

THE
POWER
OF
GOLD

M. G. Beatrice Thomson-

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THE POWER
OF GOLD





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By

EVERETT ST. CLAIR



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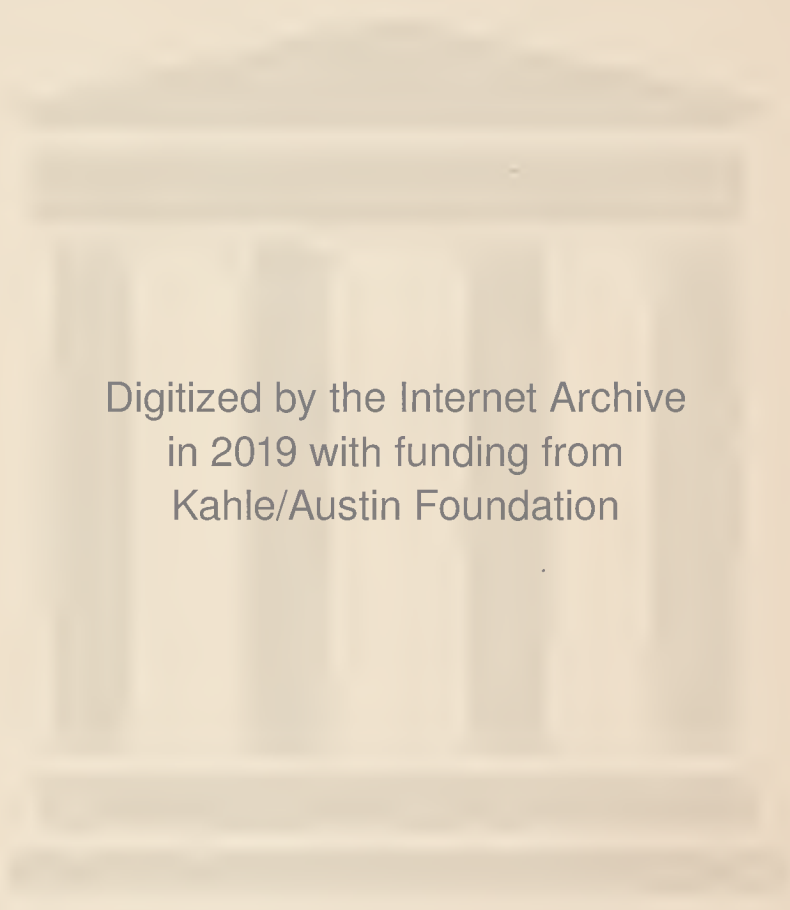
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THE POWER OF GOLD



CHAPTER I.

PHILIP WAINWRIGHT sat alone in his office. So deeply was he engrossed in thought that he did not hear his son enter.

"Hello, Dad," cheerfully called Clifford. "Why so pensive?"

"Oh, hello, Son," replied Philip, slowly glancing up, his face lighting somewhat. "Sit down, I want to talk to you."

Clifford took a chair at the end of his father's desk and waited expectantly. At once he knew that something was amiss. Seldom had he seen that grave, tense expression on his father's usually pleasant, placid face.

Philip leaned back in his swivel chair and laid a hand on his desk, where, spread before him, was an opened letter bearing a British Columbia post mark, obviously the cause of this unusual disturbance.

With a little cough, he began: "Well, Cliff, what I feared has happened. I am absolutely bankrupt. I had a long letter from the solicitor to whom I wrote for information regarding the mining company in British Columbia which I invested in. He writes me

THE POWER OF GOLD

to the effect that the said company went into liquidation several years ago. No wonder I heard nothing from them and that my letters were all returned by the postal authorities. It appears also from this lawyer's letter that the mining company, instead of being a large concern and widely known, as I was given to understand from the agent selling me the stock, was a very small one, only slightly known. Indeed, I believe the lawyer had considerable trouble finding out anything other than that there was no such company in existence today, and it was only after much searching of files in the Court House that they finally procured the information forwarded me."

"Well, that's a rotten shame," exclaimed Cliff, with asperity "I would like to go out there to British Columbia and wipe the earth with those fellows. What in blazes do they come over here for and fleece, er—ah—unsuspecting people; they shouldn't be allowed to; the Government should take steps to put a stop to such bally swindlers."

Philip smiled wanly at his son, waiting till the boy's wrath subsided somewhat.

"You said a moment ago, Cliff, that the Government should take action for the protection of the—you said, unsuspecting public. I put a different word there, which is gullible—gullible—that's the word, Cliff, and I'm that."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that, Dad. Look at all the people who invest in Canadian enterprises, and especially British Columbian. Why, lots of the mines out there are floated entirely by Old Country capital, and they don't lose money, either. By jove, there's Colonel Grey, for instance. He put money in a mine in

THE POWER OF GOLD

British Columbia and he told me once that he had not only doubled his money, but was drawing interest of twelve per cent. Think of it, Dad! Three times what he could get in England."

"I know, Cliff, and that is just why I put my money in this mine. I knew so many people who had speculated in Canadian mines, and not one of them had lost."

"Then how did you happen to have such rotten luck, Dad? Did you pick a 'boner'?"

"I'm afraid your modern colloquialism has it," replied his father, with a smile. "I picked a 'boner.' The agent selling the stock was visiting old Mr. Roberts, and he talked so well—so long—and so convincingly that both Mr. Roberts and myself 'fell' for it, and 'fell' heavily. Mr. Roberts, I'm afraid, is in almost as bad a plight as I am."

"How much did you put in, Dad?"

"All I had—five thousand pounds. My grandfather left it to me, you know. I was keeping it for a rainy day, and unfortunately that rainy day has arrived; for since that young lawyer, Haskell, came down from London, my practice has simply dwindled to nothing. There isn't room for two lawyers in a town of this size. Oh, I feel sometimes as though I had made a fizzle of things."

"No, you haven't, Dad," staunchly declared Cliff. "The trouble all lay in the fact of your Grandfather insisting on you studying law, which, as you have often told us, you never did care for, instead of allowing you to follow your own inclinations. You really have ability in art, so don't blame yourself, Dad."

"What are we going to do? That's the question," put in his father.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Sell the house," promptly answered Cliff. "It's a nice place, nearly half an acre of ground, and a pretty design of architecture. I know several people in town who would be glad to buy it."

"Yes, son, but your mother! Think of her—how she would feel about it. Why, Cliff, I took her to that house a bride; all you children were born there. It would be hard for her to leave it now, she loves it so. Every bit is dear to her—the garden, the flowers and all."

"Yes," said Cliff, "poor mother, she will feel badly. But one thing sure, she'll rise to the occasion, I'll wager."

"Oh, yes, your mother will be willing to do whatever is best. Do you know, Cliff, what I have been thinking? How about packing up and going to Canada?"

"Dad, what a fine idea! That will be the best thing that ever happened to us. Get away from this town altogether and start all over again in a new country."

"I have had this plan for a long time. I knew I was not making a living here, though if I had had the money Grandfather left it would be different. The interest on that, with whatever I did make out of my practice, would have kept us nicely, for the house is clear—I mean no mortgage or anything. However, no use talking of that now. We will be forced to make a change. Let's see, the house should, even in a quick sale, bring close to two thousand pounds. That would mean, when we arrived in Canada, after paying all travelling expenses, etc., we would have something over three thousand dollars in Canadian money."

"Yes, Dad, I understand. It seems to be a fair amount to start with. By the way, what part of Canada did you think of going to?"

THE POWER OF GOLD

"They say Montreal is a very good place; lots of positions available. I know several men who have gone there and each one of them has done splendidly—better off than they ever were here in England. I will talk it over with your mother after supper tonight. We'll go home now, it's nearly six o'clock."

Both father and son walked out to the outer office, took their hats from the old worn hat-rack that stood by the door and left the rather musty little office for the day.

Philip Wainwright was a tall, fine-looking man, just the least bit stooped, almost imperceptibly so, with deep-set grey eyes and black hair streaked with grey. His son was almost his image; just such another youth as Philip had been at twenty-two, with the same pleasant face and engaging smile. They were great pals, Philip and his son—had much in common, possibly the only matter of importance on which their views were utterly different being the practice of law as a profession.

Philip Wainwright's grandfather, with whom he had spent the greater part of his life, had been an exceptionally clever lawyer, and early in his professional career had become a Supreme Court Judge, which office he had held until his death. Philip was the only son of an only son. The son had been a great disappointment to the old judge, in so much as the only talent he seemed to possess was that of painting. The judge was furious when his son absolutely refused to enter his law edifice and, instead, left the parental roof when he was a lad of nineteen, spending the remaining ten years of his life studying in Paris, where he married an English governess, and when he died he left nothing in the world to support his little motherless son (the mother having died when the babe was born).

THE POWER OF GOLD

The grandfather took the little boy, with the firm determination of bending the child's will to his, and, as he had been possibly too lenient with his own boy, just so was he too strict with his grandson, especially so when Philip, early in his teens, had been desirous of having painting lessons, the mere mention of which had brought down the wrath of the old judge so severely that never again was the subject broached. Philip always submitted to the indomitable will of his grandfather in everything, and, in accordance with his wishes, took up the study of law, and although he found every phase of the profession to be more or less drudgery, nevertheless he had had fair success up to the past few years.

Consequently, it was simply beyond Philip's comprehension when Cliff, after leaving school, announced his intention of entering a law office.

However, Cliff had been two years in the office with his father and had proven of incalculable assistance to him, and now, walking home on this early September evening, the father felt how fine a thing it was to be able to lay his plans before this splendid son, sure of his sympathy and assistance, utterly confident in his entire support, no matter what the future held in store.

CHAPTER II.

Down one of the picturesque lanes, of which the town of Arkland boasted aplenty, walked Molly Wainwright, Cliff's eldest sister, some two years older than himself. She was a slender girl of medium height, with soft brown hair falling in waves around her fresh young face. A sweet face had Molly, with her smiling brown eyes, eyes that were both mirthful and earnest, evidence of the altogether sincerely unselfish disposition of the girl.

Some little distance behind came little Dorothy—Dotsy, as she was often affectionately called by the family—a decidedly pretty child, with her big blue eyes and fair, curly hair. Just now she was endeavoring to pull along a somewhat rickety toy wagon which was attached to a tin horse, equally rickety, and which, despite the wee girl's efforts, kept repeatedly falling from one side to the other.

"Come along, darling," called Molly, "it's nearly supper time. Daddy and Cliff will be home before us if you don't make haste."

"Alwight, Molly, I'll just give 'Dobbin' one more chance to wheel along nice."

But the chance was of such long duration that Molly sat down on a log to wait, looking away over the woods, with the sun dipping behind the trees in the distance and the autumn leaves swaying in the gentle breeze. "What a lovely spot," thought Molly. "How I should regret to leave it all. I wonder how things are going to turn out anyway. It will be too bad if we have to leave this dear old town." At this stage of her thoughts, little Dorothy ran up carry-

THE POWER OF GOLD

ing the tin horse and wagon in her arms and sat down beside her. Looking up in Molly's face and noticing the thoughtful, rather sad expression, she snuggled up closer, slipping her hand in one of her sister's.

"What's the matter, Molly?"

"Oh, nothing, darling; that is, nothing I can tell you."

"Yes you can, Molly; I'm most five years old now, I'll understand. Is it about going away—anything like that?"

"Why do you ask that, Dotsy?" exclaimed Molly, in surprise.

"Oh, I heard Mother say to Hannah, when she was setting the table one day, that perhaps Hannah had better be looking for another place 'cause we might be going away. How long would we stay, if we went, Molly?"

"I don't know, Dotsy, and besides, we intend letting Hannah go anyway. Mother and I are going to do the work after this."

"Was that what made you feel badly, Molly?"

"Oh, dear, no; I don't mind the work! It was something else, but don't bother, dear."

"Well, then, don't you bother, Molly; if anything worries you don't fink about it."

"There, that's the kind of advice to give one. Now let's jump up and see how fast we can get home."

* * * * *

When they arrived home, their mother, Margaret Wainwright, was repotting some plants by the side bay window. In appearance she was rather more than medium height, still slight of figure, with

THE POWER OF GOLD

brown eyes like Molly's—a fine looking woman, with a strong, intelligent face. As Molly and Dorothy came around the side of the house, she turned and smiled, stooping to kiss little Dotsy.

"Well, dears, back from your walk?"

"Yes," replied Molly, "I was wishing you had been with us, Mother; it was simply wonderful in the woods."

"No doubt it was, but I wanted to get these plants potted; it's high time they were in."

"Oh, look at dat dear 'ittle titten," cried Dotsy, and away she ran.

"Where has that child gone now?" asked her mother.

"Only after an old tom cat, which she calls a dear 'ittle titten," laughed Molly. "But say, Mom, now that she is out of hearing, tell me, has Dad heard from the lawyer in Canada regarding those shares he bought?"

"I don't think he has, dear, but we mustn't build our hopes too high. The shares may not be worth much, and if not—if he has really lost heavily—then I suppose we'll have to sell the house. We have nothing else."

"Then why bother repotting those geraniums if we won't be here, Mother?"

"Won't someone else be here, Molly?" quietly asked her mother. "Someone will be benefitted; therefore my labor won't be lost, will it?" and she smiled up at her daughter.

"Oh, Mumsie," said Molly as she patted her mother's shoulder, "of all the high ideals, you dear soul. Of course, it's the right thing, only—well—I don't believe many would take that view of it."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Oh, yes they would; it's just such things as that which help to develop our characters. Now you had better go in and see how Hannah is getting on with the supper. Here's your father and Cliff coming already."

"Very well." Molly turned down the walk to the front steps and across the narrow porch.

It was a typical English home, surrounded by a lovely garden, lawn and flowers, with a holly hedge on either side. Entering the oak hall, she stood for a minute and gazed about her. How she loved the place. She hoped against hope they would be allowed to remain. Crossing the hall to the long, comfortably furnished living-room, she paused. Here had been the scene of so many happy gatherings; also the library beyond, generally known as Dad's study. Well, she would take Dorothy's advice and not think of worrying subjects. Retracing her steps to the opposite side of the hall, she entered a large, sunny sitting room, back of which, in the dining-room, Hannah was busily setting the table.

Molly crossed the sitting-room to the west bay window, where a boy about nine years of age sat painting. A quiet, thoughtful child, eyes like Molly's but with a fragile, pale little face. Ronald Wainwright was not a strong lad, and Molly, noticing his rapt expression, said: "Oh, Ronny, dear, it's out romping with Dotsy you should be, instead of indoors painting."

"Don't talk, Mol, don't talk. I'm just getting this sunset."

"Oh, you're hopeless," replied Molly, as she passed on to the dining-room, just as her father and Cliff entered with cheery greetings and stood behind Ronny's chair looking down at the really fine piece of work on the little easel.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"My word," exclaimed Mr. Wainwright, "what a fine picture, Ron." Then a sigh. "What would I have given to have had painting lessons at your age, or even in later years."

"Why didn't you?" asked Cliff.

"How could I, boy? I had too much to do keeping the wolf from the door. Still, when you youngsters were small I used to paint. Remember the old easel in the attic?"

"Oh, rather. You did many a good little sketch, Dad, but I wouldn't care a hang for it. I'd rather study a law book any day."

"Yes, yes, I know," hastily replied his father. "I believe in letting each one follow and develop whatever talent or aptitude he has. Always best—one makes a greater success. But while I may be too old to take up painting, it would be fine to deal in arts—start in business for myself. With sufficient capital I could make it pay and be at last working at something I should really enjoy."

Just then the door flew open, and bouncing into the room—yes, bouncing, no other word would adequately describe it—came two girls. The elder, Betty, was eighteen years of age, a little more than medium height, had black bobbed hair, rosy cheeks and dancing blue-grey eyes. Her sister, Shirley, almost two years younger, was a smaller girl with fair, curly hair, fair as her sister's was dark, but with much the same kind of eyes, perhaps a little larger and a wee bit bluer. These girls were the life of the house, full of fun and nonsense, but generous and good-hearted to a fault.

"Whew, we had a race from school," panted Betty.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Yes," cried Shirley, "we came through Brown's meadows and a bull chased us. At least Betty said it was a bull, only it turned out to be a cow. I fell and tore my skirt."

"My word," exclaimed Betty, looking down at Shirley's torn skirt. "It *seems* the seam is slit—slit skirt. What do you think of that? Our Shirley. Next thing we know she'll be copying the French and wearing her wrist watch on her ankle."

"Such nonsense," exclaimed her mother, entering the room with a huge bunch of flowers for the table. "What would they do that for?"

"Oh, just to keep up with the times," smilingly replied Betty.

"Hm," spoke up Cliff. "Wrong there, Betty; the French lead, we follow."

"Well, perhaps it's to *watch* their step then," replied Betty, with a saucy toss of her head.

"Come, everybody, supper's ready," called Molly. And, laughing and chatting, they wended their way into the dining-room, where Hannah, the maid, served them a deliciously cooked meal.

The Wainwrights were a happy, affectionate family, who took a keen delight in the interests of one another. Whatever affected one member affected all, and, unlike a great many English parents, Margaret and Philip had always made companions of their children, thereby cementing the bonds of affection and love much more closely.

When the meal was over, the children returned to the sitting-room; Dorothy and Ronald for their evening game before going to bed; Shirley and Betty to study their lessons—that is, when they were not romping through the rooms, for their lessons never

THE POWER OF GOLD

received very serious attention, though repeatedly they promised their mother to settle down to real hard studying shortly. But as yet that promise had not been fulfilled.

"Come into the study, Margaret," whispered Philip to his wife as she stood a moment by the sitting-room door, "I want to talk with you."

"Very well, in a moment, Phil," answered Margaret. "Cliff, get a little more coal for the grate, please, and Molly, you'll put Dotsy to bed before long, won't you? Dad and I are going into the study."

The study was a cozy little room where Philip Wainwright and his wife had spent many happy evenings, leaving the sitting-room to the other members of the family. The quiet evenings here with Margaret seemed to Philip to make up for all the hard grind of the day, but tonight it was with a feeling of foreboding and anxiety that he followed his wife into the room and placed her favorite rocker by the fire, where she sat down and waited for him to begin. This he did not do immediately. Instead, he began pacing up and down the room till Margaret could stand it no longer.

"Phil," she said, "come here." He came and stood beside her. "Now tell me what's the matter. Oh! never mind, I'll tell you what it is; just something we both have been fearing for some time. Is that not so?"

"Yes, Margaret. I had a letter this afternoon. The whole thing is wiped out; not a cent do we get. I see only one course to follow—that is, to sell our home."

"That is no news to me, Phil. I rather expected it might

THE POWER OF GOLD

even come to that. I'm ready to part with it, dear and all as it is to me. If it must be done, why we'll do it. We'll move into a smaller house and live within our means. Others have had to. Surely, we're as brave."

Philip said nothing. Again he paced the floor, till once more Margaret brought him to her side and made him sit down.

"Philip Wainwright, there is something else on your mind. You haven't told me all. Come now, I'll bear it, whatever it is. Come, out with it, there's no use hedging."

"Well, I had a plan—but—well—I hardly know how to tell you. It's just this way, Margaret: I haven't been making a living at the office for the last year. My practice has gone to pieces. This town is too small for more than one lawyer, and since young Haskell came he has been getting most of the work. In fact, I have had so little practice, it has been necessary to borrow money for living and office expenses. So I thought, as we must sell the house, which will bring somewhere about two thousand pounds, we could pay off the debts I speak of and still have sufficient to pay our passage to Canada, and have, well, say, approximately six hundred pounds when we reached Montreal."

During this recital Margaret sat motionless, her lips white and set, merely saying when he finished: "Have you spoken of this to Cliff?"

"Yes, Margaret, I have, and he was not only pleased with the plan, but enthused. Thinks it's a good practical idea."

"Well then, Phil, I'll agree to it," said his wife slowly. "It will be a terrible break, severing all the old ties, but perhaps, after all, best. Oh, how I wish we had never bought those shares."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"I know, dear. I've regretted it more times than I can tell, and it was all my fault, but the man who sold the stock assured me it was such a wonderful chance, and that I was getting in on the ground floor. I certainly did—I was *floored* alright."

"We'll say no more of that, Phil, it's past and gone. I know you did it for the best."

CHAPTER III.

The girls for once had finished their lessons and had gone up to bed immediately. Something in their parents' demeanor had sobered them tonight. They seemed to sense the impending crisis. It was Shirley who broke the tension.

"Dad was rather quiet tonight, wasn't he? And, for pity's sake, whatever is he doing down there? Sounds as if he is carrying something, pacing back and forth, doesn't it?"

"I'll bet he is carrying something on his mind and is scared to tell Mother," replied Betty.

"I saw Cliff and Molly whispering together when we came upstairs. I bet sixpence something's up. Let's go down and ask them."

"Right-o," agreed Shirley, and both girls made for the door, flew along the hall, jumped on the banister and slid down like the tomboys they were. When they entered the sitting-room Cliff and Molly were sitting by the fire talking very earnestly, stopping abruptly when the girls came in.

"What's the matter in this house, anyway?" demanded Betty.

"Yes, tell us what it's all about. One would think there was a ghost in the house." Shirley's blue eyes widened.

"Well, I'm going to stay right here so long as there is the ghost of a chance of finding out what it is," Betty said, with a swift glance from one to the other. "We should be told, anyway. No use of you two keeping us in the dark. If there is a nigger on the fence, let's have him. Come on, trot out your dark horse."

THE POWER OF GOLD

Just then the study door opened and Mrs. Wainwright called: "Cliff, would you and Molly come in here for a few minutes, please. We want to have a little conference."

"Well, I'll be blowed," exclaimed Betty, as she stepped out into the hall. "What's the matter with Shirley and me? Why keep us out? We're nearly grown up."

"No, dear," smiled their mother, "you run along to bed."

"What's it all about, Mummie?" Shirley inquired of her mother, as she kissed her good-night.

"You will both know in the morning, girls, so you won't have long to wait." With that Mrs. Wainwright went into the study with Cliff and Molly and closed the door.

"Well, I'll be gosh-darned," exclaimed Betty indignantly. "What in the dickens is up?" And wonderingly the two girls walked slowly up to bed, to lie awake talking over this strange aspect of affairs.

Finally they heard Molly running upstairs softly, calling good-night to her mother, and to their surprise, turn the handle of their door, with: "Are you awake, girls?"

"Yes, yes, come on in," cried both at once as they turned on the light and sat up in bed expectantly. "What's it all about, Moll? Do tell us," coaxed Betty as she moved over to let Molly sit on the foot of the bed.

"Well," began Molly, her eyes shining, "Mother said I might tell you, if I wished."

"Alright, go on and tell us, then. I'm so excited I can't sit still," this from Betty.

"Well—," again began Molly hesitantly, none too sanguine of

THE POWER OF GOLD

how the news might be received, "we're going to sell the house and go to Canada."

The two girls in bed turned and stared at one another, open mouthed—incredulous.

Betty was the first to speak:

"Molly Wainwright, is that true? Sell this house—our home? Why they might pretty nearly as well sell one of us! Go to Canada? Leave everybody—all our friends and relatives and everything? Oh, Molly, it's horrid—horrid even to think of," and she buried her head in the pillow and cried the first real sorrowful tears she had ever shed.

"Now, Betty, dear, please don't cry. It is hard for all of us, but for Mother's sake we must keep up and be bright. Cliff said in the sitting-room tonight that if we would all brace up and act as though we were delighted it would help Mother more than anything."

"Act delighted?" sobbed Betty. "How can we? Why did Dad ever get so hard up buying that dashed old stock in British Columbia?"

"Oh, yes," broke in Shirley hopefully, "the stock, what about that? Why doesn't he sell it?"

"It's no good. Like the man who sold it," sobbed Betty from the depths of the pillow. "My word, I'm so mad at that man. He had no business to come over here to England and sell Dad shares that were no good."

"But why isn't the stock good?" persisted Shirley. "It says in our books at school many parts of Canada are stocked with splendid cattle."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Oh, Shirley," cried Molly, laughing, "it isn't that kind of stock; it's shares in a gold mine."

"Yes," said Betty, coming to life once more and drawing herself to a sitting position, her face very red and tear-stained, "a gold mine without any gold in it. You little goosie, did you think it was cattle?" and she smiled through her tears at Shirley.

"So Dad put five thousand pounds in gold shares?" said Shirley slowly. "Why, I would expect to buy the whole mine for that."

"Hm," grunted Betty, "I'd take 'mine' to the bank," her composure returning, also her ready wit.

* * * * *

The following morning the girls appeared much as usual, talked brightly at the breakfast table, even exclaimed over the thrill they expected, going to such a wonderful, glorious place as Canada. They would be sure to get on, would soon be rich and could then return to England, if they wished. Even little Ronnie had been primed by the thoughtful Molly—what to say and what to refrain from saying.

"Molly's a brick," whispered Cliff to Betty in the hall after breakfast, "and you girls are not far behind her."

The following week Mrs. Wainwright took Dorothy and went up to London for a few days to make some necessary purchases and also to bid good-bye to her sister, Alice, and Aunt Lucy.

Mrs. Wainwright and her two sisters had been left orphans when quite young, and had been brought up by Aunt Lucy, a

THE POWER OF GOLD

widowed sister of their mother's, a dear old soul, who had certainly been a mother to the three girls; and they, in turn, were most devoted to her. She was making her home, for the most part, with Alice, whose husband had a position as an accountant in a London office. Alice was not as strong as the other sister, so Aunt Lucy tried to assist her with the two small children. The second sister, Maude, was married to a poor country doctor, but she was as strong and capable as Lucy was weak and unfit.

It was the fact of leaving her own people that weighed heavily on Margaret. These loved ones meant so much to her. But, as she had said to her aunt as they bid one another farewell, she loved her husband, had taken him "for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer," therefore this change in their circumstances must be met, and met cheerfully. They would live in hopes that the future might bring a reunion. She would come back to England and see them all some day. Aunt Lucy smiled brightly through her tears and, with a long last embrace, replied: "That's right—that's right, my dear; and remember, Margaret, it's the woman worth while who can hopefully smile when everything goes dead wrong."

* * * * *

Arriving home, somewhat dreading the ordeal before her of packing and the numerous items that called for her attention, Mrs. Wainwright was much relieved to find her kind and thoughtful sister, Maude, already to the fore.

"Oh, you dear, dear Maude!" she exclaimed as she entered the

THE POWER OF GOLD

sitting-room and greeted her sister affectionately, "I am so glad you are here. I feel the need of all the moral support and any other kind that I can get."

"It's likely I'd let you go off to Canada without me coming to see you off," good naturedly replied Maude, as she lay the folded garments she had ready to pack on the table. "I came as soon as I got your letter and can remain to see you safely off, for both our girls are at boarding school and Doctor John so busy that he scarcely knows if I am there or not. So now, my dear, we'll just get the trunks and boxes down and begin packing. We can talk as we work. I have these things mended and ready. Cliff and the girls are up in the attic getting the trunks down, so you had better have a cup of tea and then give me a hand folding these clothes. By the way, I suppose you know the house is sold?"

"Yes, Maude, I do. Phil met me at the station and told me all about it. I was so glad we got our price for it; really more than we hoped for. Phil says we will have about seven hundred pounds when we arrive in Canada. That should do us till Phil gets into something, don't you think, Maude?"

"Oh, yes. Don't be afraid, Margaret. I know a friend of Doctor John's who had very much less than that to start with and got along splendidly."

"I'm not really worrying, Maude, but you know that dear husband of mine—well, I wouldn't call him a financier exactly."

"No, but Cliff has a good business head, Margaret, and one thing you and Phil have done, that is to bring your children into your plans and confidence; it's a splendid idea and one we English do not always see the importance of."

THE POWER OF GOLD

As Margaret Wainwright was drinking a cup of tea prepared by the thoughtful Maude, the girls came in laughing; Betty telling them about old Mrs. Potts, who came to see if they needed anyone to help them pack. "She said," went on Betty, "to be sure and not take much bedding. Her sister-in-law's cousin went to Canada and wrote back it was 'hot as blazes' all the year around, and when I said, 'Oh, no, that couldn't be,' she declared it was. You didn't need blankets or anything heavy at all. So I asked her what part of Canada the cousin went to. 'A nice little town called Florida,' she replied."

"Not much worse than our Shirley," laughed Molly, "thinking the stock Dad bought was cattle," and they all joined in a laugh at Shirley's expense.

"Never mind, Shirley," said her Aunt. "It would have been better had it been a herd of cattle."

"You're jolly well right," laughed Betty, "but who ever 'heard' of Dad putting money in anything so tangible?"

"That's true," smiled her Aunt. "Come and give me a hand with these stockings, Betty. Can you darn?"

"My word, yes, Auntie. You should just hear me, and if 'darn' isn't strong enough, I know some other words."

CHAPTER IV.

At last the day arrived for the Wainwrights to start their journey. Dressed and ready, they gathered in the hall taking a long last look at the dear old home. Sorrowfully they glanced around the bare rooms, empty but for the huge packing cases which stood in the hall and living-room.

The girls tried heroically to be brave, but their faces were grave and their mother's hands trembled as she buttoned Dorothy's coat. Little Ronald went from room to room, his big brown eyes looking sadly around the empty spaces, and occasionally giving the walls a loving little pat, till Betty burst out with: "Oh, I say, let's go. I can't stand the barren look of this dear old house another minute," and the tears started down her cheeks, while Molly's and Shirley's eyes filled instantly, but in another moment they all breathed a sigh of relief as the motor drew up to take them to the station.

"Alright, children, time to go," said Philip, as he put his arm around his wife and led the sorrowful little group through the open door and out to the walk, where on either side grew a hedge of Margaret's dahlias, waving gently in the sunshine of the bright September morning, and on the lawn the "For Sale" sign lay abandoned on the smooth green grass.

A silent, mournful family, leaving the home of their birth, the home they loved and cherished, where their life had been full of happiness. Well, thought Aunt Maude, as she and Cliff brought up the rear, if only those stock promoters could see this little

THE POWER OF GOLD

procession and know the sorrow of these aching hearts, would they cease from their ruthless grasping for riches at the expense of the unfortunate ones they rob?

The trip to Liverpool was uneventful. A large number of friends and neighbors had gathered at the station to wish them bon-voyage. Small remembrances were exchanged along with numerous parcels and packages of bon-bons and other dainties, bouquets of early autumn flowers, then, amid promises of letters, future visits and what not, they were off.

The trip to Liverpool was but a short journey, and before they came to the full realization of the fact they were on the boat waving good-bye to Aunt Maude and one of their cousins who had come up from London to see them off.

"I'm so glad," whispered Margaret to Philip, as they stood by the rail, "that poor Maude has Cousin Bella with her; she will feel less lonely after the ship sails. Why, I do believe we're moving!"

"Yes, dear," Philip answered. "The gangplank has been taken in. We're off," and he closed his hand over Margaret's, whispering, "to a new home—a new start, Margaret, dear."

* * * * *

The voyage across the ocean was wonderful. The Wainwright's had not thought much about the voyage, barring the fact that they sincerely hoped none of them would be seasick.

The first day out Shirley felt queer, felt like swallowing all the time, she complained.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Go to it," Betty advised. "May be the last chance you'll have for awhile."

But the symptom passed and Shirley wasn't seasick, nor were any of the others, consequently the trip proved most enjoyable, their fellow-passengers charming, the service perfect, and altogether everything conducive to not only a pleasant time, but a very merry one.

All this, coming so unexpectedly, was probably more appreciated. Philip and Cliff spent most of the time in conversation with several men from Montreal, seeking all the information they could regarding the land of their adoption.

The girls, especially Shirley and Betty, enthusiastically entered into all sorts of amusements, while the children romped and played and Mrs. Wainwright made many charming and congenial friends.

"Why don't you come and play games with us, Molly?" asked Betty one night, as the three girls were undressing in their stateroom.

"You and Shirley are everlastingly with that young doctor," answered Molly, "and I haven't met him."

"He has asked often enough for us to bring you along, but you won't come."

"Well, I don't know. I would like to meet him—but—well—I don't exactly want him to know it."

"What don't you want him to know?" sleepily asked little Dotsy from the upper berth.

"She doesn't want Doctor Holmes to know she wants to meet him," glibbed Betty.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Oh, Molly, that's mean," said Dotsy with a yawn, "'cause he wants 'awful' to talk to you."

"Why, how do you know, you little minx?" laughed Molly.

"He telled it to me," replied the little girl, as she turned over for another doze.

* * * * *

On deck, the object of their conversation, Dr. Roger Holmes, a tall, handsome chap, with a clean-cut face, deep-set hazel eyes and a strong chin, paced up and down. He was thinking of Molly Wainwright, thinking of her as the sweetest, finest girl he had ever met—but he hadn't met her, that was just the trouble. That she didn't wish to meet him was evident. Here was the trip half over, while he had spent most of the time amusing her sisters and playing with that cute little kid, Dorothy, all in hopes of meeting Molly. What a pretty name, he mused, and what a pretty girl. Why did she so openly avoid him? Well, he would try his luck again in the morning. In fact, every succeeding morning till the end of the trip if necessary, and the strong chin looked still firmer as he determined that he would pin his faith to the old adage, "Faint heart never won fair lady."

The following morning was wonderful and, as Doctor Holmes took his stroll after breakfast, he noticed Dorothy and Molly just ahead of him.

"Here is my chance," thought he, as he quickened his step.

Just then Dorothy turned and, seeing him, pulled away from Molly and came bounding towards him. At that moment old

THE POWER OF GOLD

Mrs. Marsh, a rather dear, if indeed fussy old lady, called Molly to fasten her shawl more securely; then, taking the young girl's arm, commenced to walk down the deck with her.

"Dash it all," muttered Roger, "isn't that just my luck—darn that old woman." But he kept a firm clasp on Dorothy's hand, hoping Molly would come back to fetch her. The little midget chatted gaily and finally, with a little tug of her hand, she said: "Come on, walk fast and catch up to Molly."

"No, no," he objected, "your sister wouldn't like that."

"Yes she would. She wants to meet you awful bad, only she said she didn't want you to know it."

"Oh," laughed the doctor, "is that it? Well, well, isn't that nice." His face beamed, while his heart skipped a beat.

"Look here, little girl, don't you let her know you told me that, will you?"

"Why, Doctor, don't you really want me to?"

"I really don't," crisply replied the doctor.

"Oh, alright then, I won't."

"That's the girl," smiled Roger, relieved. "Let's have it a secret."

"That will be lovely. I just love secrets," agreed Dotsy.

By this time they had caught up with Molly and Mrs. Marsh, but again Mrs. Marsh spoiled his plans by saying: "Oh, my dear, I wish you would take me in. Oh, the wind—isn't it awful?"

And for the second time that morning Doctor Roger Holmes muttered most uncomplimentary remarks towards the poor old soul, but at that moment Mr. Marsh came around the corner, took his wife by the arm and, after a few minutes' chat with Molly, they sauntered off together. [27]

THE POWER OF GOLD

Roger immediately stepped forward and, lifting his cap, said:

"Good morning, Miss Wainwright. I suppose I must introduce myself, since I cannot quite depend on little Dorothy here; she might run off, then I would be out of luck again."

"Oh," said Molly, the color rushing into her face, "it's Doctor Holmes, isn't it? I have heard my sisters speak of you."

"Is that so?" laughed the doctor. "We have been having rather a jolly time, as you English would say."

"Indeed?" said Molly, a wee bit touched at any such reference to their English expressions.

Roger at once sensed his blunder, but before he could reinstate himself, Molly said with some dignity: "And how would you Canadians express it, may I ask?"

"Oh," laughed Roger, "I suppose we would say, 'Gee, whiz, but we've had the dickens of a good time.'" At which Molly was forced to throw back her head and laugh, too.

Quickly changing the subject to more fortunate channels, Roger asked if she had ever been to Canada.

"No," replied Molly. "We are going out, as a family, to make our fortune. Do you think we have a chance?"

"Yes, I do, Miss Wainwright. That is, if you come prepared to work, one and all. By the way, Betty tells me you intend taking a business course?"

"Yes, Doctor, I think I will. I have never been taught to earn my own living. We English girls are not, as a rule; but, coming to Canada, we intend doing as you suggested now—all work, that is, except Mother, of course."

"I think a business course is best for you, Miss Wainwright,

THE POWER OF GOLD

and when you are ready for a position, I'll be only too pleased if I can be of any service. I might get you in the hospital. Would you like that?"

"Very much," answered Molly, again blushing. "Shirley tells me you are one of the house doctors."

"Yes, I have been there ever since I graduated, nearly two years ago. I'm greatly interested in my work. Such a chance to do something for humanity; more than just jogging along making money, though money's alright, of course," he hastily added, "but there is something higher to live for, don't you think?" and he turned a glowing face to his companion.

"Yes, I do," replied Molly. "So many times I have had the same desire, to do something worth while, to live so—well—I hardly know how it put it—leave footprints on the sands of time."

"That's it," replied the doctor. "Gives a zest to life, you know, doing our 'bit,' as the boys used to say at the front."

Just then, from seemingly nowhere into the here, came Dorothy, exclaiming: "Why don't you two play. Don't you like each other?" and she looked from one to the other, her brows drawn together in a little frown.

"Sure we do—at least, one of us does," answered Roger, with a smile towards Molly, who again reddened, and, taking Dorothy by the hand, said: "Come, Dotsy, it is almost lunch time; we must go in."

"I may see you tonight, may I?" anxiously inquired Roger as Molly hesitated. "Please, for the dance, won't you?"

"Well, yes, I expect I can for a while."

CHAPTER V.

"What a lovely moon," said Molly, as, with Doctor Holmes beside her, she sat curled up in a steamer rug on deck. It was their last night on board.

Only four short days since they had met, yet a friendship had sprung up between these two, based on one of the most necessary and lasting of all qualities—compatibility of temperament, developed and realized, no doubt, through the propinquity of those last few days. Roger was more keenly aware of this than Molly, though Molly had never before felt this wonderful sense of companionship towards any man. She cared not why or how it had originated, so long as it had come, was hers to enjoy—to dream about. What the future held for both had scarcely given her a thought, so long as they were together, enjoying the moonlight on the water, dancing in the ballroom, or promenading on deck—that was enough, let the future take care of itself.

Not so Roger. While he had enjoyed these pleasures to the utmost, nevertheless it was always with a sense of impending separation. The time was passing so quickly, so surely—each day bringing it all to an end—the end. Oh, no, that couldn't be, must not be. Vainly had he broached the subject to Molly of the time when this trip would be over. Could he see her in Montreal? Where would they be staying? How about showing her around a bit? But to all such advances Molly seemed either to be uninterested or uninformed as to her parents' plans. Roger was plainly puzzled to know which it was.

THE POWER OF GOLD

The truth was Molly knew only too well where they were bound for after leaving the boat, knew all her family's plans and was well aware that the cheap hotel or boarding house their means would allow for would not do at all to have Doctor Holmes visit. Her pride would not permit such exhibition of the family's poverty, and how to escape the issue caused her equally as much perplexity as her present attitude caused the doctor. So now, Molly's reference to the calm, clear night gave Roger the opening he wished.

"Yes, Molly, it is beautiful. The autumn evenings in Canada are wonderful, and tell me, may we not spend some of them together? Please. You don't want our friendship to end now, do you?"

"No," replied Molly slowly. "We'll likely meet in Montreal sometime."

"But where?" persisted Roger. "Have you no idea yet what hotel your folks will be stopping at?"

"No, I really don't know."

"Then how can I find you? For I must find you, Molly. Don't you see, dear, I can't let you go out of my life like this? Wouldn't you care if we lost track of one another, or am I presuming too much to think that you would?"

"No, Doctor, not that. But we've only known each other a short time—just four days you know."

"Four days," ejaculated Roger. "Four days on board ship is worth four months on land."

"Oh, is it?" quickly replied Molly. "Evidently you know more about it than I do. You see, this is my first trip; but, no doubt, you—"

THE POWER OF GOLD

"No, Molly, don't misunderstand me. I don't know from experience. I only know that we have been almost constantly together for the last few days, and I want this friendship to continue—so much; it means such a lot to me, Molly," and he took her hands in his and gazed lovingly down at the sweet, thoughtful face. "There is no one else, Molly, is there; no one you are leaving behind?" he inquired anxiously.

"I'll tell you, Doctor," began Molly, ignoring his question. "How would it be if I mailed you our address when we get settled?"

"That will be fine," he hastily replied, grasping eagerly at the suggestion. "Then it's a promise, Molly?"

"Yes, a promise," she smiled back, rising from her chair.

"Molly, wait; you didn't answer my question. Is there anyone back in England?"

"Oh, yes, lots of people; thickly populated," she laughed, as she moved towards the door.

"No joking, Molly, is there?" But before she had time to reply in the negative, as she intended, the cabin door flew open. Several of the men and girls stepped out, exclaiming: "Oh, here you are! We've looked all over for you. We're all to have supper together. It's our last night on board."

In vain did Roger try in the next two hours for even a word with Molly, but the last night's gaiety was at its height and not till finally the party, after much hilarity, disbanded, did Roger find himself, for a brief moment, alone with her. Then, quickly drawing her to one side, slightly behind the group of girls on their way to their staterooms, Roger slipped an arm around her

THE POWER OF GOLD

waist, while he whispered tenderly in her ear: "Tell me, Molly, there's no one else, is there?"

"No, Doctor, there isn't," answered Molly softly.

"Darling," murmured Roger, as he bent and kissed the fair, smooth cheek.

Another minute and the girls turned back to meet them. Yet it was with a light and happy heart that Roger bade them all good-night and turned in the direction of his own stateroom.

* * * * *

The voyage over, the great liner sailed majestically into the dock with the usual hustle and bustle and hurrying feet running to and fro. Everywhere eager, smiling faces lined the rail watching for loved ones on shore, to meet and welcome them.

Philip, with Margaret and the children, stood looking on. He felt a twinge of loneliness that no welcoming hand would greet him or his in this vast throng. Brushing aside the thought, he turned to Cliff standing by his side.

"Well, Son, here we are."

"Yes, Dad, we're actually in Canada, and only one month ago today since we talked the 'pros' and 'cons' over in your office."

"Jove, Cliff, been quick work, hasn't it?"

"Indeed it has, Dad."

"Are you as sanguine as ever about the move, Son?"

"I surely am. More so. I can hardly wait till the boat docks to get started. Not questioning it yourself are you, Dad?"

"Oh, no, no; only I'm certainly glad I brought the family

THE POWER OF GOLD

along. Must be terribly lonely coming to a new country by one's self."

"It would be that. No danger of us, though—eight of us," replied Cliff with a grin. "Some family. I dare say we'll keep one another company all right."

"What are you thinking about, Mother?" tapping her playfully on the shoulder as Mrs. Wainwright, with a far-away look in her eyes, watched the crowds on the wharf.

"I'm thinking," she said, as she turned towards her husband and son, "how much I should love to have someone meet me."

Philip laughed. "Why, that's just what I've been thinking, too, Margaret."

"Must be telepathy," spoke Cliff.

"Well, it isn't the first time your mother and I have experienced it, is it, Margaret?"

"No, indeed it isn't, Philip. Telepathy is the result of kindred minds drawn together in soul sympathy. It isn't at all surprising that so many husbands and wives experience it."

"It seems to me, Mother," Cliff spoke musingly, "it would take a lot of soul sympathy to live together for twenty-five years. A serious business, this getting married."

"And a great deal more serious not to," replied his father.

"Never mind, folks," said Cliff, "perhaps you two will go home to England for a visit some day and we'll all be down to greet you back again. How is that, Mother?"

"That would be wonderful, Cliff. I'll start looking forward to it right now. There goes the gangplank at last. Doesn't it

THE POWER OF GOLD

take a long time for the boat to dock? Here is Doctor Holmes to say good-bye. Where are the girls?"

"Over there," said Cliff. "They are bidding some of their fellow-passengers farewell."

Doctor Holmes had just a fleeting glimpse of the Wainwright's getting into a taxi, then they were lost in the crowd. He had hoped it might be one of the hotel's buses, so he would have known to which one they had gone, and it was with a keen sense of disappointment he had watched them go. However, Molly had promised to send him her address when they were settled. Surely she would; but suppose she didn't? Well, he would find her, that's all. Still, if they had only known what hotel they were going to. He had suggested several, but they had not, for some reason, decided on any of them. However, he couldn't stand there gaping after them. Besides, here was Dad coming, and he went forward quickly to meet a short, thick-set man, with a round, jovial face, who was walking rapidly towards him.

"Well, well, Dad," clasping his father's hand in both of his, "how's everything?"

"Fine, fine, Boy! Mother and the boys are fine, too. Both boys off to military school, and Mother home busy preparing for your homecoming."

CHAPTER VI.

The Wainwrights chose a third-class hotel on one of the side streets. Even at that, they soon found it making inroads into their little nest-egg, so Philip and Margaret started house-hunting, that they might get settled as soon as possible.

The rest of the family went sight-seeing. Montreal they thought a wonderful city, and each day brought new discoveries of interesting sights and new delights. The weather, too, was perfect—those crisp, cool autumn days, with a tang in the air that October invariably brings in Montreal.

But their holiday was soon over, their father having rented a comfortable eight-room house, in a good, if not fashionable, district, and the work of unpacking and getting settled in the new home began in earnest.

Everyone worked with a will, and in less than two weeks after their arrival, the house was well in order.

"Here we are, settled in Canada at last," said Betty, as, for the first time, they sat down to the dinner table one evening. "I can scarcely realize it; and the house looks nice and comfy, doesn't it, Mom?"

"Yes," replied her mother, "it certainly does, and at least the old furniture looks home-like."

"You know," began Shirley, "I'll tell you now, I wondered if there would be Indians here. I knew Montreal was a city, but, nevertheless, I imagined there would be Indians walking up and

THE POWER OF GOLD

down the streets, with war paint and feathers, and I wasn't so sure that they wouldn't try to scalp some of us."

Everyone laughed at the ridiculousness of Shirley's idea of a Canadian city.

"I suppose," said Betty, "you thought, because they had Indian summer, that they should have Indians?"

"Well, I don't know. You don't need to make fun of me. Why, there's Cliff. Mother disturbed him when he was reading one of his law books today, and asked him to go out and buy her a jar of currant jelly, and when he got to the store he forgot what she had said and asked for a jar of currant jelly beans."

A general laugh was given Cliff, and Molly remarked: "The clerk must have thought him crazy."

Whereupon Betty said: "Oh, I guess he thought Cliff a green bean and put it down as the 'current' events of the day."

"Well, everybody makes mistakes some time, don't they, Mom?" asked Dorothy.

"Yes, darling," answered her mother, "I expect they do."

"And, pray, what do you know about it, Miss Dorothy Wainwright?" asked Betty, with amusement.

"Oh," began Dorothy, "that last night on the boat, when Mom said I could stay up wif those ladies a little later, I was going over to sit beside 'em, an' there was some men there, too, an' another girl wif red hair."

"Yes, I know," said Betty, "that Miss Roach. If there were any men around she would be there alright."

"Well," resumed Dotsy, "I pushed past the mens, so I could sit by the ladies, and that pushed one of the men closer up against

THE POWER OF GOLD

the red hair girl, so he apologized to her, an' said he would have to sit there to make room for me. So I said: "'At don't matter. Miss Roach likes the mens better than the womans, anyway, especially when 'ere is a moon.' An' everybody laughed, and I got a little mad, an' said: 'Well, I knew, 'cause I heard Miss Roach say to Molly, what was a moonlight night wifout a man.' Then they all laughed more harder, but Miss Roach just laughed a little, an' looked like she was cross at me. Just 'en Betty came for me."

"Well," said Mrs. Wainwright, "evidently it was time I did send Betty for you."

"'At's what one of the ladies said. I fink it was Miss Roach's Aunt, an' she looked cross, too, but it wasn't my fault. I was twying to be a dood girl, an' I went 'round an' shook hands, an' said dood-night to 'em all, just like you always told me to, Mom, only I fordot Miss Roach's name, an' when I came to her, I said, 'Dood-night, Miss Cockroach,' an' everyone laughed again, an' she looked madder 'en ever."

* * * * *

"Now," said Philip one evening as they sat in the living-room, "we must lose no time in getting positions. I have been to several offices myself, but as yet have not been successful. However, no doubt I shall before long. How about you, Cliff?"

"Well," reported Cliff, laying down his book and stretching out his feet before the blazing logs on the hearth. "I made arrangements this afternoon to go into Mount & Rolls law office.

THE POWER OF GOLD

Only twenty-five dollars a month. I thought they paid higher wages to law students here, but I find they don't. I'm to receive thirty-five dollars per month at the end of six months. Also my time spent in your office is to count. So, if I pass my intermediate and finals (I told them I had taken my first), I'll be called to the Bar in two years."

"That's fine," said his father. "You really could not have done better, and two years will not be long in passing, Cliff."

"And," spoke up Molly, "I am starting on Monday to take my business course. No dissenting voices?"

"No," smiled her mother. "We all think that is splendid of you, and the girls must start to school."

"Oh, bother," pouted Betty, who, with Shirley, was sitting on the floor playing with Dorothy's kitten. "Can't we go to work, too?"

"No, no; finish your high school course and get your matriculation before attempting anything else, then you may take up some line of work, something lucrative, as it will be necessary to earn your own living from now on, and it is very essential to have a good education, my dears; and also let me remind you both, your music lessons begin on Monday, and please, girls, make good use of your time."

"Oh, surely, we'll use time," said Betty. "You have to, in music, and you do, too, Mom. You have a 'time' making us face the music. All joking aside, Mother, dear, Shirley and I intend doing good work—going to really settle down, aren't we, Shirley?"

CHAPTER VII.

The late November afternoon was drawing to a close, as Margaret touched a match to the fire in the living-room, drawing her husband's chair up to it and lowering the window shades. The place did look pretty and home-like, thought Margaret, as she opened the doors into the dining-room.

The house consisted of living-room, dining-room and kitchen downstairs, and four bedrooms up, all of which Margaret kept immaculately clean, and, as she often said to Philip, it was well to be kept busy, no time to worry then; though with her bright, cheerful disposition, worry, as a rule, was not in her line. But today she felt somewhat apprehensive. Philip had not secured a position yet and, with the winter advancing, it would never do to dig too deeply into the two thousand they had tucked away in the bank. That was to be left for emergencies. However, she must shake off this feeling of foreboding, not let herself become pessimistic over it. Work—not brooding—that's what counted. She would go to the kitchen and start the dinner; the family would soon be home. The two girls, with Ronny and Dorothy, had gone tobogganing, thoroughly enjoying the exhilarating and, to them, unusual winter sport.

As Margaret was slipping the roast into the oven, Molly came in.

"Mother!" she cried excitedly, "what do you think? You know I sent a note to Doctor Holmes inviting him up sometime? The postman just handed me a letter as I came in, and it's from

THE POWER OF GOLD

him, saying he will be up this evening if we will be in. Isn't that fine?"

"Yes, dear, it is indeed. But what if it isn't convenient?"

"Oh, well, in that case, he gave me his phone number at the hospital, and I suppose he expects I'd phone him in any case."

"He certainly lost no time. You only sent it yesterday, didn't you?"

"Just yesterday, Mommie. Oh, I'm so excited. Let's have dinner early and get it over. Should I phone the hospital?"

"I'll say you'll phone the hospital," cried Betty, breezing in from the front hall. "I'm nearly starved. They'll need a padded ambulance to cart me away in." And she pulled off her toboggan cap and gloves, threw them on a chair, cut herself a huge piece of bread, buttering it with the carving knife, and ate it with a relish.

Then the stamping of feet heralded the approach of the others on the back porch, and amid much stamping of snow, mingled with their hearty laughter, in they came, rosy, healthy, and happy, even to little Ronny, usually so pale.

"Oh, we're hungry," they cried. "Give us something to eat, Mom."

"Alright, children, but skip out of my way and take off your things, all of you. Dinner is just ready. Here, Betty, help dish the vegetables. We won't wait for Dad and Cliff."

"They are coming in now," said Molly, as she left the phone in the hall.

"Say, what were you intending to phone the hospital for, Moll?" asked Betty, balancing the vegetable dish in one hand.

THE POWER OF GOLD

Molly explained about the doctor's note, and Shirley, coming into the kitchen, stopped to listen. Both girls were delighted, for the doctor, with his friendliness and bright, cheerful manner, had quite won their hearts.

"Wonderful," cried Shirley, and clapped her hands with delight.

"Good stuff, Molly," said Betty. "Just wait till I dish up the dinner and I will tell you what to wear. That is, besides that charming smile you have on at present."

"Now, Betty, that's not nice," reproved Molly. "But look here, girls, you won't stay in the room all the time, will you?"

"Just won't we, though," grinned Betty. "We'll stay as long as we can, and then send Dad in. The whole blooming family will take turns. We want to appear hospitable, don't we?"

"Stop teasing," said Shirley. "Trust me, Molly. I'll see that she doesn't stay, and no tricks, either, I promise you."

"Who's coming, and who will you send in?" asked little Dotsy from the open doorway.

"Oh, Dotsy," cried Shirley, "Doctor Holmes is coming. Isn't that nice?"

"Goody," cried Dorothy. "Can I stay up and see him, Molly? Please, Molly, and then I will be a dood girl and go wight to bed?"

"Alright, dear, if you don't stay too long."

"Come, come, girls," called Margaret, as she hurried into the kitchen to take the roast out. "Cliff's in a hurry. Jack Ross, who is in the office, has asked him to go skating with him and his sister."

THE POWER OF GOLD

Whereupon Betty walked quickly into the living-room to confront Cliff with: "So you are going skating with Jack Ross, eh? I suppose his sister is the attraction?"

"Take my advice and don't get on thin ice. It's known to be dangerous in more ways than one. Now, a good way to break the ice, when you are introduced to her, is give her a few compliments about her eyes, hair, and so forth—just something fitting that would embrace them all. Not embrace her, though," she added hastily. "She might give you an icy stare and then you would find yourself in deep water."

"Look here, Betty," said Cliff, looking up from his paper with a grin, "you think you are jolly clever, don't you? Just use a little of that surplus energy and bring in the dinner, or you'll get into hot water. Now make it snappy," and he made a jump, grabbing hold of Betty's shoulders playfully and marching her towards the kitchen.

Dinner over, Molly hastened upstairs to dress, leaving the two girls, whose duty it was to wash the dinner dishes, running pell-mell with plates, cups and saucers piled high, in a vain endeavor to complete their task before Doctor Holmes arrived, while Dotsy rushed upstairs after Molly.

"I can stay and watch you dress, can't I, Molly?"

"Yes, Dotsy, dear, you may, if you are a good girl."

"What are you going to wear, Molly?"

"Oh, I don't know, whatever I look well in."

"Do you want to look pretty 'cause Doctor Holmes is coming?"

"I most certainly do, little Dotsy; you may rest assured of that. I think I will wear this black velvet. The girls like it on

THE POWER OF GOLD

me, and if I only look becomingly gowned tonight—”

Just then, the dishes put away after a fashion, both girls came tearing into Molly's room.

“Say, Moll,” began Betty, “he'll sure ‘fall for you’ in that black velvet. Hm—I'll say.”

“Fall for you?” echoed Dotsy, perplexed. “What would he do that for? Is he going to do tricks, do you mean, Betty?”

“Yes, that's it,” laughed Betty, as she stooped to straighten Molly's dress. “Do tricks? He will be up to all sorts of tricks, won't he, Moll?”

Shortly after eight the doorbell rang and Mrs. Wainwright answered it, Dorothy close at her heels. Molly was not ready to put in an appearance yet. So after greeting him cordially and chatting pleasantly as he removed his hat and coat, then showing him into the living-room, Margaret went to call the girls, leaving the doctor sitting before the fire with little Dotsy on his knee, his sole companion.

“Molly isn't dressed yet,” stated Dorothy, looking up in the doctor's face. “She never took so long to dress before. Betty said so. But it's just because you were coming. She said she wanted you to think she looked nice, and she does. She has her new dress on an' everything, and put violet bath salts in—”

At this juncture, Molly very opportunely made her appearance, and Dorothy was dispatched to bed.

* * * * *

Roger's visit was over; the door closed softly, and Molly,

THE POWER OF GOLD

turning out the lights, ran quickly up to the girls' room.

"Are you awake, girls?" she whispered, as she gently pushed the door ajar.

"Yes, yes, come in," and two sleepy, tousy heads were raised from the pillows, keenly alert to any news Molly might have to impart.

"Listen, girls," and Molly perched herself on the foot of the bed. "Doctor Roger has asked me to go to the theatre next Thursday."

"Oh, isn't that great?" exclaimed Shirley, sitting up very straight, delighted that Molly should be invited out.

"He stayed long enough to ask you to marry him," said Betty, brushing a strand of hair from her eyes. "Is it Doctor Roger you're calling him now? Hm, pretty speedy, I'll tell you. Have you decided on the date yet?"

"Don't be silly," said Molly. "But aren't you glad, girls?"

"Surely we are," both girls exclaimed.

CHAPTER VIII.

A few evenings after the visit from Doctor Holmes, Cliff came in the dining-room as Molly was putting the chairs to the table for dinner. One of the boys in the office, he told her, was making up a party to go to the military ball the following week and wanted him to join them and bring Molly along.

"How about it?" asked Cliff, as they sat down to the table.

"Oh, I don't know," answered Molly. "I would dearly love to go, but I have nothing to wear but that blue silk. I've worn it two seasons already."

"Never mind," said her mother, "I'll make it over once more."

"Sure," said Betty, "you should worry what you wear. I'd go if I had to wear my nightie."

"Now, now, Betty," admonished Margaret.

"Yes, Molly," spoke Shirley, "that blue dress was always becoming, and Mom will make it over."

So it was decided that Molly and Cliff would go to the dance, and all her spare time for the next few days Margaret spent working on the blue dress.

Finally, when the night of the ball arrived, it was a very beautiful Molly who tripped down the stairs, followed by the two girls, with Dorothy bringing up the rear, carrying her best little silk handkerchief neatly folded, her contribution to the costume. Molly wore Betty's evening coat, one that Aunt Maude had sent her on her eighteenth birthday, a beautiful pale blue and silver brocade trimmed with white fur, and Shirley had donated

THE POWER OF GOLD

a very pretty string of pearls, fairly good ones, also a present from the generous and kind-hearted Aunt Maude.

"Well, now," said Margaret, as she came out to the hall to meet them, "you're quite a well-dressed young lady, let me tell you. The dress made over very nicely and she looks very pretty, doesn't she, girls?"

"You certainly do, Moll," exclaimed Shirley and Betty, beaming their approval.

"The boys'll think you are a raving beauty with your glossy brown hair—and it's so soft and wavy. Be sure you have lots of fun, but you mustn't meet anyone that you'll like better than Doctor Roger."

"And listen, old dear," whispered Betty, as Cliff slid into his overcoat and opened the door, "be sure you come in our room when you come home—just for a minute."

"Oh, it will be too late," protested Molly.

"Never mind, we always go to sleep again—right away. Now be sure," and gave her a playful little push onto the steps.

"I wonder what kind of a time our dear old Moll is having?" said Shirley, as she undressed that night.

"Hope she keeps her promise to waken us when she gets home," said Betty, as she brushed her hair. "Molly will have a good time. She's a sweet, pretty girl, that sister of ours. The boys will be crazy about her."

"Yes, I expect she will get lots of attention," replied Shirley, "but I really don't want her to like any of them better than Doctor Roger. He is lovely—so tall and handsome, such merry eyes. He is away ahead of those chaps in Cliff's office."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Sure," replied Betty, "but come on, jump into bed and we'll have a good sleep before she comes. I didn't do my French tonight."

"Oh, Betty, and I heard Miss Black tell you not to leave school without taking your French book."

"I know," answered Betty, as she tucked in the bedclothes, "but I took French leave. I should worry, I'm going to sleep while my conscience will let me."

About two o'clock Molly gave a light tap on the door, and both girls sat up in bed almost instantly.

"Come in, Molly," they called softly.

Molly walked in rather wearily and sat down in her usual place, at the foot of the bed.

"Tell us all about it," asked Betty, rubbing the sleep out of her eyes. "Did you have a wonderful time?"

"Oh, in a way," began Molly slowly. "But guess who was there."

"Who?" they exclaimed expectantly.

"Doctor Holmes, with an awfully pretty girl; tall and dark, with wonderful eyes."

"Well, I never!" said Betty disappointedly. "Did he ask you for a dance?"

"Yes—which I refused."

"Why, Molly," spoke Shirley reprovingly, "I would have danced with him anyway."

"Well, I wouldn't," burst out Molly. "If he wants her he can have her. Here he invites me to a picture show or theatre, and takes her to a big dance. It just spoilt my evening. We hadn't

THE POWER OF GOLD

been there half an hour till Cliff said: 'By jove, look who's here!' I glanced across the hall and there was the doctor. He saw us at once, and bent down to say something to the girl, and brought her over to introduce us."

"Who was she?" asked Betty eagerly.

"Miss Maxine Grahame, he called her, and she put her hand on his arm as though she owned him. Well, she can, for all I care. Cliff had a couple of dances with her, but when Doctor Holmes asked me for a dance, I just smiled and said I really didn't have one to spare."

"What did he say?" asked Shirley.

"He got very red and looked a bit disconcerted—as well he might—then bowed and walked away. For two pins I wouldn't go with him Thursday. You girls get to sleep now. I must go to bed; it's late," and Molly, very near to tears, got up and left the room.

Molly was plainly disappointed. Moreover, her pride was hurt. The girls conferred together what should or could be done, for they looked on this as their affair almost as much as Molly's. Shirley thought it better for Molly to keep the engagement for the theatre—to act as though nothing had happened; for, after all, nothing had really happened.

"Absolutely not," argued Betty, as they walked home from school the next afternoon. "I'd mighty soon show him where he got off at. I'd tell him a thing or two. The perfect idea, taking our Molly to a show and that other girl to the ball! Molly says they talked of the ball, and he didn't even say he was going; didn't want her to know—that's it; didn't think she would ever

THE POWER OF GOLD

find out. Believe me, I'd tell him a thing or two! Maxine Grahame, indeed! He may be engaged to her. I wouldn't be a bit surprised. Cliff says she is a nurse in the same hospital as the Doctor."

Molly tried in vain the next few days to get the doctor on the phone, but each time failed. Then she thought of sending a note to the hospital, but Shirley begged her not to. Thus Thursday night came, with her still undecided, and it was in a very unhappy, perplexed mood that she wended her way from the office. Cliff caught up with her walking home from the street car.

"Well, Sis, what's on your mind?" he said jovially, as he fell into step.

"I'm in a quandary, if you know what that is."

"What about?" as he took her arm, the streets being more than usually slippery.

"Well," she replied slowly, "whether I'll go to the theatre with Doctor Holmes or not."

"Why, certainly, go, you little goose." Cliff's voice was emphatic. "Pay no attention to him having that Grahame person to the dance; you haven't any right to. You don't suppose he's going to drop all his girl friends just because you came along, do you?"

"No, Cliff, I don't; only he might be engaged to her."

"Well, supposing he is; that's his look-out, isn't it? You take my advice and go; have all the good times that come your way, but don't take any of these fellows too seriously, that's all; not even the doctor."

"Alright, Cliff, old dear," Molly said, as they turned in at

THE POWER OF GOLD

the gate, "I guess you're right. What does it matter anyway? Suppose he is engaged. I think I have listened too much to Betty's views of the situation."

In the hall they met Betty making a wild dive for her music roll, it having dropped from her lap as she grabbed frantically for her rubbers.

"Hello, there!" greeted Cliff, picking up the music roll and restoring it to Betty's lap. "Late as usual. Your teacher will be dubbing you the 'Late Betty Wainwright' if you go marching in always behind time."

"That sounds like the dead march," jibed Betty.

"Isn't Shirley going for her lesson, too?" asked Molly, as she removed her hat and coat.

"Oh, yes, but you catch little Shirley being late. She went on half an hour ago."

"Well, she takes time by the forelock," said Cliff.

"I'll say she does," Betty answered, getting up at last, and stamping her feet down more securely. "Shirley takes time by the forelock and I take my time and go my own gait."

"I see," grinned Cliff, as he hung his coat up. "Well, you'd better make it a swinging gait and clear out of here."

"Keep my bath water hot, will you? There's a dear?" said Betty, turning to Molly.

"Oh, I can't, I'm going out," answered Molly.

"Who in thunder with?"

"The Doctor," replied Molly, smiling.

"Well I'll be—! Before I'd go I'd see him—"

"Now, now," chided Cliff, "don't go spoiling things, Betty.

THE POWER OF GOLD

Wait till your turn comes. I guess you'll pocket your pride for a good time, too."

"Yes—will I?" said Betty, opening the front door. "You watch me. I would send him to blazes!"

"Miss Brown will be sending you to blazes," supplemented her brother.

"Guess she'll make it hot for me, all right. I'm an hour late, so I'm sure of a roasting anyway."

That evening Molly dressed with great care. As she came downstairs, Dotsy exclaimed: "Why, you look as pretty as a queen, Molly! Guess he'll like you now."

"Why, Dot, what makes you say that?"

"Oh, I just guessed it," replied Dotsy, looking very wise, with her little curly head on one side. "Somefing I heard, but couldn't 'member, made me guess."

At this moment Mrs. Wainwright came out of the kitchen. "I do wish those girls would come home and get at their lessons. Having an early dinner and trying to get to their music teacher's by seven is most inconvenient; besides, it breaks into the evening so! It's almost impossible to get them down to study their school work afterwards. However, I expect they will have to stop their music lessons anyway."

"Stop their music, Mother! Why, whatever for?"

"I'll tell you again," looking at Dorothy, who was listening intently.

"Tell her now," said Dorothy. "I won't tell anybody, truly I won't. I know lots of fings, and I doesn't tell nobody. Is it

THE POWER OF GOLD

'cause Daddy is getting poorer, giving men money for more stockses, or somefing like that, eh, Mummy?"

"Why, Dorothy," exclaimed her mother, "don't, for pity sakes, repeat that to anyone!"

"No, no, Mummie, truly I won't; but I know," and she whispered to Molly as the doorbell rang and her mother stepped forward to answer it.

"I knows all about the Doctor having another girl, too."

"Hush, hush," whispered Molly, as she bent to kiss the little upturned face, "but you won't tell, will you, Dotsy?"

"Not if you don't want me to, Molly."

"That's a darling," and she kissed her again, relieved, turning to the door, where the Doctor was stamping the snow off his feet.

Molly had meant to be very cool with him—on her dignity, but the Doctor was so jolly, laughing down at her as she slid along beside him on the slippery snow. Molly was the only one in the family who had not readily become accustomed to walking in the snow. In the evenings, returning from business college, she would come in, flushed and rosy from her exertion, declaring she had walked backwards more than forward, and if some night she didn't arrive at all they would know she had slid all the way back to town. Tonight was worse than ever, as there had been a slight thaw in the afternoon, turning freezing cold towards evening, so poor Molly had need of the Doctor's strong clasp on her arm to insure her equilibrium.

"You certainly are not used to the snow yet, are you, Molly?" he said laughingly, "or should I call you Miss Wainwright? You know, I was under the impression we were quite well enough

THE POWER OF GOLD

acquainted to allow for us both dropping formalities, but, if I remember correctly, it was reverted to the last time I saw you—that is, you called me Doctor Holmes most—er—shall I say, pointedly, did you not?” This in a jovial manner. Then, noticing the serious expression on his companion’s face, realized the importance of an explanation of his seeming choice of companion the night of the dance. Now was an opportune time to make it.

“You were annoyed with me the night of the dance?” he began gravely, “were you not?”

“Well,” answered Molly, “I wouldn’t exactly call it annoyance. Really, I can’t see that it makes any essential difference what I thought; and with regards to me calling you Doctor, I nearly always have done so, with the exception of the evening you were up, a week ago.”

“Then, can you tell me why you started ‘doctoring’ me again?” This with a tighter clasp on her arm and a twinkle in his eye.

“No,” stammered Molly, in a desperate effort to appear casual. “I guess you need doctoring to keep you from flirting.”

“Molly Wainwright,” he replied in a hurt tone, “is that the opinion you have of me? A flirt, am I. I like that. Look here, Molly, look at me. No, not a little side glance like that. Here, stand still a minute. There, that’s better; you need a rest anyway—give you a chance to get your breath. Now, then,” as he put both his hands on her shoulders, glancing around to be sure that no one was looking, “you were peeved with me the other night, weren’t you?”

“What night?” parried Molly.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"At the military ball. You know well enough. You wouldn't even give me a dance."

"I had them all taken."

"Yes, but not before I asked you."

"To tell you the truth, Doctor, I didn't want Miss Grahame to think I was trying to take you away from her."

"Hm, so, Molly, you think she has some claim on me, is that it?"

"Yes, it is. She kept her hand on your arm just as though she had a claim on you. In fact, I thought you were very likely engaged to her. Not that it would make the slightest difference if you were, you know," this airily, with her head held high.

"Would I be taking you out if I were? Would I, Molly?"

"Well, no. But you might be nearly engaged," looking up at him furtively, and in spite of herself, waiting eagerly for his reply.

"Hm, so that's it, is it? Look here, Molly, I can't explain everything. You see—one can't talk about a girl. It isn't done. Yet, neither can I let you go on thinking things. Let me see. Oh, hang it, Molly, I don't know just how to put it—that I won't feel an insufferable cad," and he dropped his hand from Molly's shoulder and walked silently along, feeling that a fuller explanation was forthcoming, but, blast it all, how could he say that Maxine Grahame had tripped up to him the week before the ball to say she was selling tickets for the dance, and would he buy one, or two? Did it in such a way that there was nothing for it but to extend the invitation. Then, at that time, he had not found Molly yet, either. To tell Molly all this was scarcely the thing. Still,

THE POWER OF GOLD

he couldn't leave the impression that he had really preferred Maxine.

"Molly," he began, looking very worried and perplexed, "that was the first and only time I ever took Miss Grahame anywhere and I certainly would not have then if I had known where to find you."

Molly looked up at him quickly, with one of her sweetest smiles, and a wonderful thrill of gladness surged through her.

"We won't say anything more about it, then, Doctor. After all, you have a perfect right to go with whom you like. No doubt you have lots of girls, and I certainly don't expect you to drop any of your friendships." All this from Cliff's point of view. Then, laying her hand lightly on his arm as she smiled up at him, said: "I was foolish to ever mention it."

"Then you'll forgive me, won't you, for I'm not a flirt, Molly. Neither have I all the girl friends you speak of," as he quickly covered the little hand with his own, feeling tremendously relieved.

"We'll just forget it, won't we, and remember, Molly, if anything ever happens like that again, know this—there is some good reason—that is—well—it won't be because I wish it. I don't care a hang for any girl on earth, Molly, but you, and I want you to know it. So let us be friends, eh?" and his spirits went soaring once more. "Real good, staunch friends. Those are the kind that count; and let us cultivate that friendship, not lessen it by any misunderstanding. What do you say, Molly; willing?" And he looked radiantly happy as he smiled down, and thought he had never seen anything half so lovely as those wonderful soft brown eyes as they looked earnestly up into his.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Yes," said Molly, "I am satisfied, Doctor."

"Then just drop the Doctor stuff, like a dear. Just Roger from now on," and he stopped walking, drew her gently to him, and as she turned her face inquiringly, he caught her in his arms and kissed her as she had never been kissed by anyone.

"Oh," breathed Molly.

"Sweetheart," said Roger; and for one long minute they gazed longingly into each other's eyes.

When Molly got home everyone was in bed, but it was a very happy girl who tiptoed upstairs and was just going softly passed the girls' door when snap, on went the light, and Betty called in a low voice: "Moll, come here!"

Molly opened the door and smiled at them. "Just for a minute, then," a bright, joyous note in her voice.

"Now," said Betty, sitting up and drawing the comforter around her. "Tell us all about Doctor Holmes. Or is it Doctor Roger again? Come on now, out with it?"

"Nothing much to tell," Molly replied with a little yawn, though her dancing, sparkling eyes belied her words.

"None of that," Betty chided, with mock severity.

"Well—I don't know what to tell you, girls."

"Tell us everything, of course. You can't get away with anything less, and us lying here propping our eyes up with expectations for the last sixteen hours."

"I'll bet you quarreled with him," Shirley frowned.

"Indeed, I did not. We had a perfectly lovely time, and he is going to take me to the hospital dance next Thursday."

"Oh, goodie," cried Shirley. "You must get a new dress. Get

THE POWER OF GOLD

a pale, pale pink; that shade suits you better than anything, doesn't it, Betty?"

"Yes; but I would like to hear more of this Maxine person. What about her? Why did he take her to that dance?" questioned Betty, clasping her hands around her knees by way of support.

"Just because he couldn't very well do otherwise," Molly spoke quietly. "He didn't say so in so many words—but I know."

"You do, eh? And I suppose you know what has made your face all red? What made it, the wind, I suppose? Hm, is there anything else in the wind?"

"You little minx," laughed Molly. "I won't tell you a thing more. I'm going to bed."

"See, Betty, that's what you get for teasing," said Shirley.

"She's afraid to tell us anything else."

Molly was exceedingly happy. The days and weeks passed all too quickly, amid a series of wonderful outings with Roger—skating, sleighing and tobogganing. At first she was afraid of the latter, but with Roger steering and she close behind him, it was all so wonderful that her timidity gave place to an ecstasy of enjoyment.

Friday evenings were usually set aside for some sport. Roger and Cliff would take Molly, Betty and Shirley, bringing along Jack Ross, who was a law student in the same office with Cliff, and about the same age—a fine fellow, full of fun and humor, the life of the party always. He was shorter than Cliff and rather thick set, with smooth black hair and deep-set grey eyes. Not a handsome lad—rather too irregular features to be good looking; nevertheless, the most popular boy in the office. He and Cliff had

THE POWER OF GOLD

become fast friends. Then there was Jack's sister, Mildred, a pretty girl, with soft brown curly hair, whom Betty had just cause to tease Cliff about, for evidently he had broken the ice in a most satisfactory manner that first night, weeks before, when he had gone skating with Jack and his sister. Cliff had formed a warm attachment for this sweet little Canadian girl, which evidently was mutual, judging from the friendly, though somewhat shy attitude of Mildred herself.

They were a very merry party, indeed, but Roger said it wasn't fair for Shirley not to have anyone to pair off with like the others, and kept promising to invite a young doctor at the hospital, but when he remembered to ask him it was always too late, and Doctor Ellis had another engagement.

At these times Shirley would shake her little golden head, begging him not to bother. She didn't mind, not in the least. Yet when they would get home and she and Betty would be getting ready for bed, Shirley would often say she did hope Doctor Roger *would* remember; it wasn't nice being the wallflower all the time, and the boys had to take turns skating or dancing with her, as the case might be, while their partner sat out.

But one night they were all going skating, and Roger did retrieve himself by bringing Doctor Ellis along. He was a fine fellow, possibly thirty years of age with hair so light a brown as to be almost red. He had an earnest expression in his deep grey eyes and a most charming friendly smile. Shirley liked him at once, and he was charmed with Shirley; although, if the truth were known, he hadn't been keen to join the party. Roger had told him who the party consisted of and that he, Ellis, was to take Shirley.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"How old," Ellis had asked, somewhat tersely.

"Oh, let me see, about seventeen, I guess. Yes, rather all of that, for Betty is nearly nineteen and there's only a year between the girls. Why, isn't seventeen alright?"

"No, it isn't," Ellis had replied grouchyly. "She's just a kid, and I'm not at all sure I want to go."

"Oh, come along, Don; be a sport. Besides, I've been promising to bring you for weeks past."

"The deuce you have! Of all the nerve!"

"Now, Donald Ellis, brace up and be your age. There's a good fellow. Besides, you know I saved you a tubbing one night in the frat house when you were in your junior year. The night you and Willis Blater brought old man Mills' goat in and let it loose in the hall upstairs. We seniors were all dressing for the dance, remember?"

"I do," grinned Don. "Had the time of my life."

"That was the dickens of a trick," resumed Roger. "It certainly played havoc with the boys." Roger threw back his head and roared with laughter at the recollection of how Don and Willis had let the goat upstairs, and then Willis had held it while Don had gone to the rooms where the seniors were dressing, all of whom were in very scant attire, leaving the doors ajar, and then had let the goat loose, resulting in screams, yells, rushing students flying from one room to another, the goat after them. During the reminiscence of that memorable night Roger and Doctor Ellis shouted with laughter, reminding each other of the different antics of the boys, who, in several cases, were in extremely scant clothing, one of the chaps having nothing but a towel around him and

THE POWER OF GOLD

another just in the act of getting into the bath when Mr. Billy Goat poked his head in at the door, which had been surreptitiously unlatched by one of the culprits. That, indeed, had been a night to be remembered, the boys flying helter-skelter and Willis and Don safely ensconced on an old-fashioned "highboy," which stood in the corner of the hall, and from where they could gleefully witness the fun without any danger of getting mixed up with the goat, which was eventually captured and dispensed with. The inevitable followed. Don and Willis were to be tubbed, but as Roger and Don had been pals through their school life, and upon Don urging Roger to be a sport and let him out somehow, after much persuading, pleading and coaxing, Roger wavered, then consented. Probably had the goat got his "goat," the decision would have been different, but fortunately he had not been molested at all by the animal and was thereby in a mood to take a more lenient view of the escapade. So, before the seniors were aware of what was happening the lights were suddenly flashed off; then, while the rooms were in total darkness, Don and Willis made their way swiftly and silently to the outer door and escaped. School broke up the next day, so neither of the lads received the promised tubbing at all.

"Well," said Don, when their mirth subsided, "I suppose I'm in for stepping little sister out, eh? Alright then, this time, but remember, I'm not interested."

"How do you know?" retorted Roger. "You've not met her yet."

"For the simple reason I like 'em older. However, I'll go this once, old man, then we'll call quits. Better rake Willis in on it."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Willis! Why she wouldn't look at him. Willis is alright; loads of fun and all that, but he's too fat and homely. Why, with that big mouth of his he could swallow poor little Shirley."

"Oh, is that the youngster's name, Roger? Rather pretty, isn't it? By the way, what does she look like? Attractive?"

"Oh, so so," replied Roger, a wicked gleam in his eye, "straight red hair—not this henna brand, more of a brick red; good many freckles, receding chin and her teeth are just slightly 'bucked'."

"Good golly! Is that what I'm to take out? I'll not go, not a step."

"Yes, you will, old man; I have your word," laughed Roger. "And mind, she might be worse."

Donald groaned. "Might be worse? How could she?"

"Well," replied Roger, "she might be knock-kneed and pigeon-toed."

On his way to the skating party Roger called for Doctor Ellis as prearranged, found him ready and they started off, but with no enthusiasm on Doctor Ellis' part at all.

When they rang the doorbell, Molly answered it, looking charming in her tobogganing suit, for they had decided on coasting instead of skating. Donald gave her an admiring glance and felt glad for his old chum, Roger. Then they entered the living-room and Donald was introduced to Betty, Cliff, Jack Ross and his sister. Donald was glad he had come. But a moment later when Shirley, who resembled nothing so much as a grown-up Silver Locks, turned her lovely, smiling face in at the door, he stared in amazement. Who was this fairy queen? He rose as she entered and immediately Molly introduced her. Doctor Ellis

THE POWER OF GOLD

bowed in acknowledgment, his eyes giving her a quick, pleased appraisal. Surely this was not the girl Roger spoke of; and, mystified, he glanced towards Roger, who stood grinning at him. As they filed into the hall, Don gave him a dig, murmuring, "You think you are darn clever, don't you?"

"Sure," laughed Roger. "Now, aren't you glad you came?"

Don smiled contentedly and took his place beside Shirley as they walked down the front steps.

The evening proved wonderful. Probably Shirley and Doctor Ellis were the happiest of all. Shirley because it was the first time she had ever had a young man take her out; and Doctor Ellis, because he found Shirley so totally different from what he had expected.

Molly and Roger, passing them on the way home as Doctor Ellis and Shirley sauntered slowly along, paused for a moment and Roger whispered in Donald's ear:

"Won't come again, will you? Had a rotten time, didn't you?" with a mirthful chuckle. "Never mind, Don, I won't ask you again," and he stepped on with Molly, while Don hurled after him:

"You don't have to ask me next time. I'll come without asking," and he stooped down to make a snowball, which he deftly landed between Roger's shoulders.

"What does he mean?" laughed Molly, brushing the snow off Roger's back.

"Oh, nothing much; just a joke. I made him believe Shirley was a little 'fright,' that's all; got him worked up a bit," and he

THE POWER OF GOLD

related such bits of his former conversation with Don as seemed advisable for Molly to hear, ending with:

"They seem to have taken a liking to each other. Never saw Don look at a girl that way before. Gee, it would be great if in the future—"

"Roger, you old matchmaker," said Molly, smiling up at him.

"Well, you know, Molly," as he took her arm, covering her hand with his own, "it would be nice to be related to Don—that is, I mean—you," and with a nervous little laugh went on, "Hang it all, Molly, wish I had as much money as old Don has. He's an orphan, but a rich one. Here I am with nothing, struggling along on the meager salary of seventy-five per month and nothing in sight for the future. They don't pay a chap much in a hospital, you know."

"Never mind, Roger. You have parents and a home, and poor Doctor Ellis hasn't that. So you are richer after all."

"Yes, sure. I wouldn't change places with him for the world, but, O, gee, Molly, I would like things a wee might brighter on the financial horizon."

"Why don't you start in for yourself, Roger?"

"Nothing to start on. Dad can't help me out; just making a living, that's all; and then he has my two young brothers to educate. No, I'm going to try and get a post in some outlying district where they pay a fairly good salary, and until then—well—I guess I'd better not talk of being related to anyone. Only decent thing to do, I suppose."

As Molly walked silently beside him, he bent down and brushed the fair rosy cheek with his lips. "You'll still go out

THE POWER OF GOLD

skylarking with me anyway, won't you, dear?" Then: "I want to play fair, honey, but it's blamed hard to play the game sometimes."

Just then Cliff and Mildred Ross joined them, and the conversation became general.

The outdoor sports were not the only recreation these young folks enjoyed. Sometimes little dances would be given at their respective homes and all friends invited, for the Wainwrights had become very well acquainted and quite popular. Also the Rosses were an old Montreal family, Mr. Ross being an architect, having designed some of the finest building in the city. He was an exceptionally fine man, and Mrs. Ross, a whole-souled motherly woman, took her pleasures in the affairs of her children.

Doctor Holmes and Doctor Ellis had numerous friends also, and it caused Mrs. Wainwright great thankfulness as she saw her family surrounded by such fine samples of young manhood and womanhood, for she had very high aspirations for her children; wanted them to be of fine calibre, with high ideas; and realized they could not attain such without the companionship of friends equally as true, honorable and upright. This wise mother also realized the importance of recreation—good, clean sport—as a beneficial aid to character development.

Margaret often spoke in this way to Philip and wondered at his lack of response. Yes, yes, he was glad—a very good thing; a fine thing. But Margaret noticed her husband preoccupied. She remembered him saying weeks ago that they would have to curtail expenses, stop the girls' music lessons, buy no new clothes or anything they could do without. He had not secured a position

THE POWER OF GOLD

yet and seemed worried and depressed. Margaret had intended speaking of this to Molly, but Molly seemed so radiantly happy that, mother-like, she disliked to say anything that would spoil her daughter's pleasures.

At last one day, shortly after lunch, the family all out, even to little Dorothy, who was playing in the snow in front of the house, Philip paced up and down the living-room, then through the dining-room and back again, while Margaret washed the dishes, filled the tea kettle and placed it on her shining stove, all the while going over in her mind what was most likely to be troubling her husband. Would it be that he did not like the idea of Molly being on such intimate terms with Doctor Holmes? And yet he seemed to like the Doctor so much; always spoke highly of him, when he spoke of him at all, which was seldom. In fact, now that she came to think of it, Phil rarely paid much attention to Molly's affairs, or the others, either, for that matter. Perhaps he didn't want Cliff to continue his law course. Although if it had been that Margaret felt sure he would have told her long ago, and it was equally improbable that he was worried over little Ronald, who had always been a delicate child. Philip had had many an anxious hour on that account in times past, but Ronald was so much better now, since coming to Canada—off to school every day and out playing after school. Well, whatever it was, she would soon find out and stop that incessant pacing to and fro. So, taking off her apron, she entered through the dining-room into the cozy living-room, where a bright fire burned in the grate. The room, flooded with sunlight, looked very pretty

THE POWER OF GOLD

and homelike, and Margaret glanced, with housewifely pride, at the warm comfort of the place.

Drawing a chair up to the fire, she sat down, putting her hand on her husband's sleeve as he passed her, still pacing the floor with his head bent.

"Come, Phil, sit down and tell me about it." And she reached forward to push his favorite chair a little closer to the grate.

"Come on," she repeated, as he stopped walking and stared out of the window. "Sit here, Phil; do, please. I know you are worried. Tell me all about it."

"How do you know?" answered Phil, turning around with a surprised glance.

"How do I know, indeed!" she answered. "I haven't lived with you for twenty-five years without being able to read you enough for that," she retorted. "Why, my dear husband, I can tell that you are worried. You might as well confess."

"I believe you can, Margaret." But still Phil remained silent, gravely taking the chair beside his wife. Would he dare tell Margaret how discouraged he felt? How could he explain to her about that day in the early fall, when, after interviewing firm after firm—business and law firms alike—with nothing offering and no prospects for the future, he had strolled, weary and discouraged, into a stock broker's office. Again the old reply—the stock broker was not in need of a clerk of any kind. Philip was informed business was slack; always kept office expenses down; not a big concern, anyway; just enough to keep himself busy. Then he was out of town a good deal, too, but he could put Philip next to something good in a speculation. He had some

THE POWER OF GOLD

fine oil shares, not yet on the market. Could put him in on the ground floor; double his money in two months, perhaps less. It sounded so convincing. Why, if that were so, supposing—just supposing he put the two thousand—Margaret called it their nest egg—suppose he bought those shares. It might mean in less than three months they would have four thousand. Wouldn't that be fine? And even if he were not successful in securing a position, such a large amount as four thousand would last until Cliff was through his profession. All these thoughts had run through Philip's mind, while the broker talked about the merits of the oil stock.

"Is the company well known?" asked Philip. "Sure thing, replied the broker. He was a director himself. Oh, well, then, the man would have first-hand information, reasoned Philip; and more and more he courted the idea of what a wonderful opportunity was open to him. Consequently, after about an hour of pros and cons, Philip, asking all manner of questions, each and every one being answered by the broker to Philip's entire satisfaction, the shares were finally purchased and a cheque written out for them. Bidding the broker a cheerful "good afternoon," and tucking the certificate he had received for the shares carefully away in his wallet, Philip proceeded home, light-hearted, happier than for months. Might not this be the turning point in his financial affairs? Moreover, if he made money this time, he could have another go at it—get in on the ground floor, the broker had hinted; in fact, had said if Philip had other moneys for investment he could put him next to some wonderful propositions.

"Lucky," thought Philip, "to have gone into that office." Just

THE POWER OF GOLD

as the broker had said, if one took advantage of a rare chance, such as this, when it came one's way, all kinds of money could be made. Then Philip remembered the five thousand pounds he had dropped at home in England, and the thought brought him upstanding for a moment. Yet—still—well, that was different; that was a gold mine, or supposed to be. The salesman had talked very convincingly on that occasion, too; told him how quickly the stock would advance.

These reminiscences were most disturbing, but he had thrown off such disquieting and agitating thoughts. Why, of course, this was different—quite different. For one thing, it wasn't a mine, it was oil. Everyone knew how much money was to be made in a good oil well, and this, evidently, was one of the best. The broker said they expected to bring in a "gusher" and that meant doubling—trebling one's money. On the whole, Philip felt, all things considered, he had acted wisely. Perhaps it would have been well to wait and talk it over with Margaret; she had such a keen perceptibility, such intuition, and was altogether so level-headed. But, then, if he had waited to do that he might have lost the chance, just as the broker had pointed out to him. It was risky to wait; even tomorrow might be too late to get in on the ground floor; and that, he explained to Philip, meant so much to the investor.

The first month looked so bright—so hopeful. Philip was most optimistic. Several times he strolled into the broker's office. Yes, things were coming along fine, he was told, but one could not expect returns for a while yet—had to give it time. The second month, the same result. The third month went by. Philip was

THE POWER OF GOLD

becoming anxious. Surely by this time there should be some returns. He visited other oil brokers and asked if they knew anything of the G—— Oil Company. "No," they replied, "never heard of it." One after another he made inquiries of, with always the same reply. Philip grew desperate, hurried to the office where he bought the stock. The door was locked. Inquiry at the adjoining office elicited the information that the broker had gone to England and was not expected back for another month or so.

By this time Philip was worried sick. He could neither eat, sleep, nor enjoy any peace of mind, night or day. He fretted during the day and dreamed of it at night. It was uppermost in his mind at all times and under all circumstances. Could it be that he had been swindled? The broker had seemed an honest, straightforward sort of chap. Still—oh, well, the fellow would return sometime. The man in the office next door told him, when questioned, that the broker often went away for a while, always returning. Had rather a good clientele; a first-rate business man, he thought; had been there eight or ten years—well-known man about town.

All that had gone a long, long way towards easing Philip's mind. Nothing to be alarmed about after all. He had seemed on the verge of ruin, but evidently such a catastrophe was to be averted. Till one day, about four months after purchasing the stock, Philip decided it might be advisable to interview the manager of a certain large and reputable company, one that dealt largely in oil shares.

Arriving at the office, he asked to see the manager, and after some little time the office boy came back to say that Mr. Burton

THE POWER OF GOLD

would see him; would he kindly step this way. A keen, sharp-faced man was Mr. Burton, and after listening with polite attention to Mr. Wainwright's story, said in part:

"Well, sir, I have heard of the oil wells you speak of. They are in a good oil district, too, but I really don't think, myself, that there is any oil in that particular well; at least, not in any paying quantity. A company leased the property some four years ago, drilled, but never got oil and, in all probability, never will. Of course, every little while they revive interest in it and then count it an opportune time to unload as much stock as possible of their own. I am speaking now of the promoters, and if some unsuspecting person, like yourself, comes along, they do unload—that's all. The whole situation is this, Mr. Wainwright: There are any amount of reliable companies in Canada, and in the United States, for this is a rich land, as you know—oil, mines, timber and what not. People have bought shares, sold them, bought again; been successful in numberless adventures, but why on earth can't newcomers to the country approach some thoroughly reliable firm, where they sell only bona fide stock. I haven't reference to our firm alone. There are numerous reliable firms that handle only the shares of first-class companies where one's money is safe, the stock A-one. But no; they get in with Tom, Dick and Ned, and, chances are, have some no-account stock or wild-cat schemes handed out to them, and there you are. However, I'm sorry for you. You certainly have my sympathies, and, if it's any consolation to know it, there's hundreds—thousands—in the same boat, and the pity of it is, they are mostly in your own position—can ill afford to lose."

THE POWER OF GOLD

What Philip had said in reply to all this he didn't remember. He was too dazed at these astounding facts; it was all so obvious. On the street once more, this stunned sensation gave way to an overwhelming desire to see that broker—tell him what he thought of him. He would go around there at once, see if he could get his London address from the chap next door. But when he arrived at the broker's office there was the broker, standing by his desk, evidently having a little social chat with a friend, judging from his jovial conversation. When he caught sight of Philip, however, his manner immediately changed. An expression of trepidation flashed across his countenance and, turning deep crimson, excused himself to his friend, saying, as he reached for his hat:

"I have just remembered an appointment, Joe. Hope you will excuse me; drop in again some time," the friend replying as he turned toward the door: "Alright, old chap, see you soon," and passed Philip on his way to the street.

The broker started for the door a moment later, but Philip placed himself square in front of it, and looking the broker straight in the eye, said tersely:

"No you don't. Hand me back my two thousand dollars. That stock is no good and you know it."

"Now look here, Wainwright, I can't give you back your money for the simple reason I haven't got it. Business has been as dull as the deuce lately, but you needn't get scared, those shares will be alright in time."

"Nonsense," replied Philip, "they won't. I tell you I was swindled out of that money and I want it back."

"Easy, easy now, Wainwright; you were not swindled. I told

THE POWER OF GOLD

you all about the mine—I mean the oil well, and you bought the shares from me, Wainwright. Don't blame me."

"I say you misrepresented them," replied Philip hotly.

"And I say, my good fellow, I did not."

"You sold me your own shares. Your name was on them."

"Supposing I did. I had more than I wanted. That was fair enough. You got the shares, I got the money. Where was the swindle in that? And you be careful what you say, Wainwright, about swindling. I wouldn't like to have to sue you for defamation of character, you know. However, you really must excuse me. I will have to be going. Sorry and all that, but we all have to sit tight and hope for the best," and with that he turned and left him.

Philip then realized that to pursue the subject would be fruitless. The money was gone—past retrieving. He had to face the future as best he could. Day by day he hunted for work, as day by day he watched the few dollars in the bank dwindle, till at last it was all gone. Now they had nothing. Margaret must be told. Yet here he was now, sitting beside her while she waited patiently for him to begin. But how to tell her he did not know. At last, drawing himself up with his hands clenched nervously on the arm of the chair, he began. As he talked, he spared himself nothing, telling her when he finished that he realized he had acted with no more discretion than a boy of ten, his regret being he had not given her the money.

Margaret was sorry for her husband, of course. But what was to be done? That was the question. Cliff's thirty-five dollars per month would never suffice the family needs. Why, oh, why

THE POWER OF GOLD

had Philip been so foolish? But as she looked at him, huddled in the chair, contrite and remorseful, her heart filled with pity. Reaching over, she stroked his hand.

"Never mind, Philip, dear, it might be worse. It's unfortunate, of course. There is no denying that. But don't worry, we will get along somehow. Cliff had better try for a position which will give him a larger salary. He can return to the law later on. Molly is almost finished with her business course, and if we can keep the girls in school till the end of the term, they can take up some work which will be remunerative too. Let me see, this is March. Molly will be finished by the end of May."

"Yes," replied Philip, frowning, "but how are we to live in the meantime? Suppose Cliff can't find a position which will bring him more money? His present one of thirty-five dollars won't nearly keep us."

"No, I don't expect it will, Phil, dear. We had better take a loan out on the furniture. It won't be for long."

"That's so, Margaret. I suppose we might. I didn't think of that." While the idea was most distasteful, he breathed a sigh of relief that there would be money forthcoming to meet their immediate needs, at all events.

The furniture was mortgaged with little difficulty, but for only four hundred dollars. Philip was frankly disappointed at such a small amount being offered, and so was Margaret. But the money-lender pointed out that, while it was all good furniture, nevertheless most of the pieces were too old to be saleable and not old enough to be antique.

After the man had left, Margaret spoke to her husband of the

THE POWER OF GOLD

advisability of getting a cheaper house. They simply couldn't afford the sixty dollars a month they were paying, she deliberated, with only this loan of four hundred in the bank.

"Yes," agreed Philip, "perhaps we had better move to a cheaper place. I will give a month's notice on this house tomorrow, Margaret; that will give us plenty of time to look around."

Margaret put off telling the children of their misfortune as long as possible, at the same time urging Philip to try and find another home that, though lower in rent, would be comfortable. And Philip looked diligently, sparing himself nothing in his efforts to secure as nice a house as possible for the sum they could afford. Yet he met with little success, as houses were scarce and rents were high.

Meanwhile Margaret economized at every turn, buying only the dire necessities and saving in every possible way.

The girls' music lessons were soon a thing of the past, as also were the social diversions they had indulged in, such as going to the rink or a picture show with some of their school friends Saturday afternoons and bringing them all in for tea afterwards. Both girls had taken much pleasure in preparing dainty sandwiches, cookies and cakes for them, and little Dorothy would roll in the tea wagon laden with good things, while the girls brought their chairs close to the roaring fire—the fire being Ronald's contribution to the afternoon's enjoyment.

On the last of such Saturday afternoons Margaret had given them an extra treat, knowing full well that in all probability it would be the last for some time. She had told Molly a few nights

THE POWER OF GOLD

previous all about their troubles and that they expected to move early the following week. Philip had succeeded at last in getting a make-shift of a home for the time being at only thirty dollars a month; much the same style house as the present one—hall, living-room connected by sliding doors to the dining-room, kitchen and three, instead of four bedrooms upstairs. Then, too, the rooms were smaller, the hall exceptionally tiny, as were the rooms upstairs, and while it was more in the working man's district, still, the neighborhood was respectable and close to school and street car, which was a great consideration, although it was not near the high school which the girls attended. However, on the whole, Margaret was satisfied, though she realized the impossibility of entertaining their friends in such a home, unless it would be Roger and the Rosses. Even then, she knew Cliff wouldn't like the idea of inviting the Rosses there. Roger was different. She felt quite certain it would not make any difference with him where they lived.

No, Molly would not mind. It would not make so much difference to her. But Shirley and Betty! The mother-heart ached for them. To forego everything at the time when those pleasures held such great attraction for young girls! So it was with willing hands she set forth the next morning to make this last little tea a real success. Molly had suggested that a larger number of girls be invited, making it more of a "function."

"Oh," cried Betty delighted, "could we, really?" They were doing the dinner dishes together Thursday night when Molly broached the subject.

"What would Mother say?" said Betty.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"She is quite satisfied," replied Molly. "We talked it over, and Mother said perhaps you had better have all the girls either of you are under an obligation to, so when you are finished wiping the dishes call Shirley downstairs, make out a list and phone the girls. Shirley will be finished with her lessons by that time, and you did yours this afternoon, didn't you?"

"Yes, I have them finished; all I'm going to do, anyway. I hate everlasting lessons."

"Oh, you're a bad girl," spoke up Dorothy from the corner of the kitchen where she had her doll's house and was just now performing the duty of giving her five dolls a bath in an old dishpan. "You're just a bad girl," she reiterated, "and you should study hard, hard, so you'll know a lot, 'cause you got to stop soon and go to work."

Molly turned around quickly and, with a frowning look, silenced the child, while she thought, "How in the dickens does that child find out things, anyway?" She and her mother had been so very careful not to say much in her presence. Nevertheless, Dorothy had pieced together what she did hear and drew her own conclusions—and sharp and shrewd conclusions they were. However, when Dorothy was speaking, Betty had to drop her dishcloth and answer the phone, so had heard nothing, much to Molly's relief.

When the last dish was neatly put away, Betty, who was keenly interested in the coming event, ran to the foot of the stairs calling:

"Shirley, come on down! You and I are giving a tea. Hurry!"

"Oh, joy!" exclaimed Shirley excitedly, as she ran downstairs to Betty. "A tea! Won't that be lovely."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"I should say so," agreed Betty. "Mother and Molly have it all arranged. We are to invite all the girls to whom we owe a tea. Come in here by the dining-room table."

Shirley entered the dining-room with Betty, continuing:

"When I get married, Betty, I'm going to give lots of teas—bridge teas, I think. It would be fun giving bridge teas. That is, when one's married, wouldn't it?"

"I don't know, Shirley," said Betty, as she hunted among her school books for a pencil and paper. "I would have to be pretty warmly attached to a man before I could burn my bridges and marry him."

"Oh, of course." Shirley sat down by the table waiting for Betty. "And I guess one must give and take a lot when one's married, too."

"Well, I could do that alright," said Betty, sitting down with pencil and paper spread out on the table before her. "I could give a man the dickens and take a lot of cash."

* * * * *

It was a typical school girls' tea, as Margaret remarked when she and Molly were in the kitchen preparing the refreshments. Just the kind of girls she wanted Betty and Shirley to have for friends—happy, full of fun; yet, with all, kind-hearted, well-mannered and cultured.

"They certainly are, Mother," agreed Molly, as she deftly filled the plates with cakes and cookies. "I am so glad we stretched a point to have it. They are having such a jolly time! It certainly has repaid us for the effort."

CHAPTER IX.

On the Monday night following the girls' tea, Roger phoned, inviting Molly out.

"Where to?" inquired Molly, speaking low into the phone.

"Oh, anywhere, Molly, so long as it's out. Tell you what, I'll get a horse and cutter and take you for a drive."

"Fine!" agreed Molly, "providing it's a quiet horse. I'm frightened of those high-steppers you usually get. I'll be ready about eight."

"Alright, Molly, but don't be any later if you can help it, please. I have something I want your good advice on. And don't be afraid of the horse. I'll choose one that can't do much more than walk."

"That's fine, Roger, for you know the last time we went out in a cutter the horse certainly did cut capers, didn't he? I expected any minute to be landed in a snowdrift, and, as Betty would say, 'I don't get the drift of that for a good time'."

On the stroke of eight Molly was ready, well wrapped, for it was a freezingly cold night, though the stars were out and the moon shed long rays of light on the glistening snow. Molly was enchanted with the beauty of it all, as, tucked snugly in the buffalo robe beside Roger, they sped over the shining white road, while Roger gave his attention entirely to the horse, which was proving beyond a doubt that it was capable of a great deal more than merely walking. However, the animal settled down to a quiet trot, much to Molly's relief. Roger then turned to her with:

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Well, dear, I have at last received the offer of a position."

"Oh, Roger! Where? Not far away, is it?"

"Yes, Molly, that's just the point. It's the dickens of a way from here—away up the Atlantic Coast, at a place called Selfridge Bay—just a logging camp. Doctor Black and his wife have been up there for four years. He is just now returning to Montreal to go in practice for himself. I saw him today, and he tells me it is one of the prettiest spots imaginable. They had a nice little cottage, all furnished, with garden and flowers and so on—company's property, you know—and a salary of two hundred a month. How is that? Not bad, eh?"

"I should say not! Sounds very good, Roger. But what would it mean—that you would very seldom get down to Montreal?"

"Just that, Molly, dear. I could not come down at all the first year. At least, I'm afraid not. Of course, I'll try for it, you may be sure. I would like to come next Christmas. However, that is for the future to decide. But, Molly, what I am counting on is, with a free house, light living expenses, I should be able to save over a hundred a month. I can't count on much more than that, as there will be the Chinaman's wages. Blacks have a very good Chinese cook—Chung is his name—who is willing to remain. Now, I was figuring that in two years' time I should have at least two thousand dollars. Such a sum would warrant a chap thinking of—well—one could begin a home on that without starting a poorhouse, and the bungalow is a very pretty affair—climbing roses over the door, and all that sort of thing, you know. I think you would like it Molly. That is—if you—whoa—whoa! Darn that horse!"

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Oh, Roger!" screamed Molly, "see! He's frightened of that snowplow. Oh—oh," and she held on to the side of the cutter, while Roger, with all his strength, sawed on the reins to regain control of the rearing animal, shying, plunging from the huge snowplow which stood, a dark grotesque object, by the roadside. The horse refused to pass. Roger had no room to turn on the narrow road. Their fate seemed in peril. In desperation, knowing there was no alternative, Roger grabbed for the whip, with which he lashed the animal, the poor beast rearing, backing and shying, lash upon lash descending rapidly, till finally the horse gave a wild lunge and was off past the snowplow, galloping down the street, Roger clinging to the reins tenaciously.

Molly sank back in the seat, utterly spent, but relieved. She didn't mind the horse racing so furiously. Anything was better than that awful rearing, and Roger would get him under control soon. But she counted without the sharp turn at the next corner which the horse, despite all Roger's efforts, was bent on making in his violently excited rush for home, where he was obviously headed for. Swinging around the curb on one runner, the cutter swerved and turned, throwing the occupants into a deep snow-drift, the sensation of which Molly felt she would never forget. Roger still held the reins and was dragged half way down the block, when he was forced to relinquish his hold and lay still, his head unfortunately having come in contact with a huge stone which lay partly covered with snow at the edge of the gutter.

Molly hastily scrambled to her feet, surprised she could walk; surprised, indeed, to find herself not even hurt, as she had fully expected to be killed when the cutter overturned. But Roger,

THE POWER OF GOLD

where was he? Peering down the street, she saw his prostrate figure. Running swiftly down the road, she kneeled beside him crying: "Roger! Roger, darling! Are you hurt?"

"Not in the least," came the laughing response. "Just a little stunned. But call me darling again, honey, and I'll—"

At this most inopportune moment, a dozen or more people, running from all directions, were quickly to the fore, and before Roger was scarcely aware, he and Molly were both hustled into a sleigh which was standing in front of a house and were whisked away home.

"Darn it all!" soliloquized Roger, "the first time I have ever been in a position to propose to Molly and then that infernal horse had to spoil it all. She's too upset now to talk, even if we were not in this fellow's sleigh."

CHAPTER X.

"I suppose," thought Margaret, after the girls were off to school on Monday morning, "the next step is to tell Shirley and Betty about moving. Also about stopping school at the end of the term." Cliff had been told and had taken it very philosophically. He was like Molly, thoroughly unselfish, and if a situation presented a formidable aspect he made the best of it, and though he keenly regretted giving up his law work, even for a time, he would do so willingly if by that sacrifice the family would benefit.

Margaret was gathering the Monday's wash when Cliff came through to the kitchen with his overcoat, just ready to start for the office.

"Look here, Mumsie," reverting to his childhood name for her, "don't worry one little bit. I met a chap who came over on the boat with us and I was telling him I needed a job, so he suggested that I go to see his boss, which I did yesterday, and he took me on at fifty dollars per month as a starter. So that's not so bad—nearly twice what I am getting now, and a chance for a raise. It's manual work, of course—in a lumber mill—but that's alright. It's money that counts. I also interviewed the Secretary of the Law Society, and they are giving me a year's leave of absence."

"Oh, you are a dear boy, Cliff," Margaret exclaimed. "That will help out splendidly, and it is certainly very fine that you are allowed a year's leave of absence. I was wondering about that. It worried me so."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"I knew you were, but I didn't want to say anything about it till I was sure. A year will soon pass. I've taken my second exam, so when I get back it will be just one year and a half, and my finals. Then I will be called to the bar. Oh, boy, won't that be a grand and glorious day!"

"It will be the beginning, I hope, of a splendid career for you, Son, and what I would like, Cliff, is to have you ultimately get into politics and achieve something for the poor. Each city has its slums and it seems terrible that so little is being done to relieve their sufferings. Surely the Government could give them grants of land, free transportation and some competent person to teach them how to farm."

"Well, that's a large subject, Mother, dear, but I know your views and heartily agree with them, but we'll wait till I get through my course before you and I start making over the Government. Must run along now or I'll be late."

"Why, yes, Cliff," in surprise, "you certainly will be late. It's after nine now."

"I know," answered Cliff, walking through the hall to the front door, his mother beside him. "I have to serve some papers on a chap up here, and it's been so hard to catch him in. Mr. Rolls told me to try about ten a.m. We've gone about ever other time. He is dodging us, that's it."

"Well," said his mother, "why don't you leave them for him?"

"No, no, Mumsie, dear, they must be served to him personally."

"Oh, I didn't know. I would have left them with his wife."

Cliff laughed, as he bent to kiss her good-bye. "And that's

THE POWER OF GOLD

about all I ever want you to know about such matters, Mother, dear."

"Good-bye, Son, I must get to work, too, or I'll never have the lunch ready, and then it won't be a blue paper I'll be served, it'll be a walking ticket from my family."

Laughing at his mother's sally, Cliff ran down the steps and out the gate, his mother furtively watching him from the window in the hall door. What a fine, stalwart lad he was; and, oh, how she hoped he would be a good man. It wasn't riches she craved for him. No, no! But just that he would take his place among men, do a man's work, make the world a little better because of him. A man of honor, that was far above riches; yes, a man of integrity and rectitude, and Cliff was that.

Margaret had taught her boy about life and about one's responsibilities, of fineness of character that every man should endeavor to attain. Indeed, her children had all been taught the finer qualities of living; taught to do right for right's sake. How often had she quoted to them the lines:

"Sow a thought and reap an action;
Sow an action and reap a character;
Sow a character and reap a destiny."

She and Philip would have just cause to be proud of their children, she hoped.

Margaret finished gathering the clothes and putting them to soak for her Tuesday's wash. She had never done a washing before in her life; yet, she didn't mind it in her effort to keep down expenses, but she had to take care the family was not aware of it. The hardest job was keeping little Dorothy outside playing during

THE POWER OF GOLD

the process. No, the fact of the washing didn't bother Margaret. It was how to tell Betty and Shirley they had to move. That fact troubled her and grieved her—to tell them of that plain little house on that plain little street.

At last lunch was prepared—a better one than usual. Margaret believed if one were forced to impart unpleasant information a fine plan to prepare them for the acceptance of it was to give them a good meal. Today she had creamed tomato soup, French fried potatoes and chops; for desert, a lemon pie, which both girls were particularly fond of. They would certainly feel in good humor after partaking of this lunch, anyway, Margaret concluded. The smaller children would be more pleased than otherwise at the prospect of moving, as moving to them seemed nothing more than pleasurable excitement.

Margaret had just taken the pies from the oven and set them on the kitchen table, their light, golden meringue done to a turn, when the girls bustled in the front door, bringing a fresh tang of crisp March air with them.

"Hello, Mumsie," they called gaily, rushing up and throwing their arms around her. Both girls were very affectionate; they loved their mother dearly, and though their demonstrations were somewhat boisterous at times, yet it warmed Margaret's heart to have them so. Returning their salutations heartily, she said:

"Now, girls, lunch is waiting; call Dorothy in; Ron is just coming through the garden now, so we will have lunch at once."

"All right, Mother," answered Shirley; "I'm ready for it. We're famished, like starving wolves. What have you got there?"—glancing over her mother's shoulder.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Oh, Betty, hurry," she called gleefully. "Mother has French fried potatoes and chops and a lemon pie."

"Well, I never!" cried Betty, coming in from the hall, where she had left her things, and bringing Dorothy with her. "You are a darling, Mummy. We both love lemon pie. If anyone ever hands me a lemon, let them put it in a pie, with heaps of white of egg."

Both girls helped to put lunch on the table, praising Margaret the while for her kindness and thoughtfulness.

"Isn't Dad coming?" asked Shirley in surprise, as they took their places.

"No," answered Margaret vaguely, "he isn't home—gone out on business," but she didn't add that he had gone to town to make arrangements for the moving Thursday.

When the meal was ended, Shirley glanced affectionately at her mother, saying: "Mother, you were a brick to prepare a meal like that when you knew the others were not coming for lunch."

"Oh, she wanted to give you a good lunch," spoke up Dorothy, "'cause she has somefing bad to tell you, haven't you, Mummy?"

Margaret put down her serviette and stared open-mouthed at the child, while the girls looked at one another with anxious eyes.

"Why, Dorothy Wainwright!" gasped her mother, "you are the limit. However did you find that out?"

"Well," began the child slowly, "I heard you saying to Molly the other day, 'Oh, dear me, but I do hate to tell those poor girls we has to move into a shabby little house'," and Dorothy put her head on one side, a habit her mother had when feeling

THE POWER OF GOLD

depressed, mimicking her mother's tone exactly. The others laughed, in spite of themselves, while Dorothy continued:

"Then, 'iss morning you told Daddy to get you some chops for the girls' lunch, 'cause you said you wanted to give them an extra good one, so I thought that you would tell 'em after they had eated it all up."

"You little midget," cried Betty, laughing, "you can put two and two together as well as anyone I ever saw."

"But, Mom, was she right?" anxiously asked Shirley, turning to her mother.

"Yes, Mother, what about it? Do we really have to move?" asked Betty, with keen disappointment in her voice.

"Well, now, girls, we will have a little talk," parried Margaret. "But first, put this child's things on and let her go out to play; and Ron, you run along to school, there's a good boy."

"All right, Mother," said Ronald, rising from the table. "I know all about it, anyway. Cliff told me when he took me sleigh-riding the other night, but I didn't say anything because Cliff told me not to."

At this, Dorothy was up in arms in a minute. Turning furiously to Ronnie, she cried:

"You'se not a bit better than I'm a bit better, 'cause I wouldn't have telled it if Mummy had told me not to, but I fought Mummy wanted it telled and she didn't like to, so I fought I would."

"That's all right, dear," soothed her mother. "Now run out to play, like a darling. Shirley, put her coat on, please; and Ron, dear, kiss me good-bye and run off to school."

It didn't take Shirley long packing little sister off outside and

THE POWER OF GOLD

Ronald to school, then she took her place at the table again.

"Now, Mother, we are alone, so tell us the worst," she said, folding her arms on the table.

Margaret told the whole story and plans already formed for the future.

"Well, I'll be jiggered," blurted out Betty, when at length her mother finished. "No sooner do we get settled down and having a jolly time than up we've got to flit."

"I know, Betty, it does seem like that."

Shirley gazed absently at the white table cloth, murmuring:

"Poor old Dad. I feel awfully sorry for him, though."

"Yes, Shirley, so do I," and Margaret rose from the table. "We must all stand by your father, whatever happens. But hurry to school now, girls, or you'll be late. Ron has been gone some time."

"Yes," answered Shirley, "but we 'shooed' him away early, so we could talk."

"We won't be late," assured Betty. "We'll hurry and work hard when we get there, see if we don't. No more playing and fooling around. We'll take our matric. in June and will pass, too. By rights I should be through now, but you know, Mother, I was out of school a whole term the year I broke my leg. That was how Shirley caught up to me."

"I remember," answered her mother, "there was some excuse for you. Then, too, the schools at home are so different."

"I should say so," began Betty, as she and Shirley put on their coats. "Why, there they are so much more particular about deportment; for instance, marks off if you failed to enter a room

THE POWER OF GOLD

properly, and all that sort of thing. Here they wouldn't care if you came in on your head, so long as you had your Latin up. However, we'll get through alrightie, Mother, don't you worry. We'll work like the dev—, I mean the deuce. Don't give me such a reproving look, Mummy dear, I just mean the dickens. There, is that mild enough? We won't disappoint you, anyway. But goodness, I'd like to have that broker by the back of the neck. I'd fix him—he sure would be broke when I finished with him. But we don't mind moving, Mother; truly, we don't. It won't be for long, and if people don't want to come to see us in that plain little house, they can go to h——."

"Betty, Betty," admonished her mother, "you really must stop such language—it's dreadful how you express yourself, dear."

"Never mind, Mummy," Betty laughingly replied. "I'm the only black sheep you have. See what a nice little white lamb Shirley is. She wouldn't say 'boo' to a goose—would you, Shirley? So come to school, Baby Lambkins."

"Go on, go on," laughed her mother, giving her a playful little push towards the door, "and no more playing or nonsense again this term. Get through your matriculation, then you can play all you like."

"Right you are," called Betty, as she flew out the front door.

CHAPTER XI.

The girls were keenly disappointed when they first saw the old, drab house that was to be their home, yet characteristically tried to hide the fact from their mother—make the best of it—never let on—and so well did they keep to that resolution that Margaret was wonderfully relieved, finding herself quite happy and hopeful again.

“What dear, good children we have,” she said to Philip.

“Indeed they are,” heartily responded her husband.

“If I can only get work now, it won’t take long to get on our feet once more. Then I will give the youngsters the time of their lives—make up for all this hardship. If ever I can afford it, I will lavish them with good things.”

But as time went on and no position was obtainable, the harassed, anxious look again appeared on his face, which Margaret had noticed so often before. What to do, Philip could not think. Once more he paced the rooms, thoroughly perplexed and disheartened, especially when the family was out. When they were all home at night he felt lighter at heart, less worried. What with the gay banterings of the older ones and the innocent chatter of Dot and Ron, it reflected on his own spirits and caused him to feel things were not so bad after all.

Molly was the least affected by their present circumstances, as Roger was a constant visitor. Just at present he was particularly keen to get Molly’s viewpoint on the position offered him through Dr. Black. At last it was definitely settled; Roger was

THE POWER OF GOLD

to leave in two weeks' time, as he informed her one night when they were at a Medical Fraternity dance. The subsequent result of that fact, leading to a long-cherished desire of Roger's to ask Molly one all-absorbing, important question, which, up to the present, he had had to relinquish all thought of on his then very inadequate salary.

Therefore, it was a very radiant Molly who, after bidding Roger a prolonged good-night, went into the house, closed the door noiselessly and ran swiftly upstairs to the girls' room, opening their door softly so as not to disturb the rest of the sleeping family.

"Girls," she whispered excitedly, tiptoeing into the room, "are you asleep?"

"No, we're not," exclaimed Betty. "Turn on the light, Shirley; it's at your side of the bed."

"All right, here it is," and snap, on went the light, while both girls sat up expectantly, and Molly took her accustomed place at the foot of the bde.

"Well," and Betty peered into her face, "how's everything? You look flushed."

"Oh, girls," and Molly's voice vibrated with joy and she clasped her hands ecstatically. "What do you think? I'm engaged—really and truly engaged."

"Engaged?" the girls cried in unison, their eyes staring in surprise. "Are you really, Molly?" and Betty clapped her hands in delight. "Did he give you a ring?"

"Yes, Betty, here's my ring," and she held up her left hand for their inspection, slowly turning her hand from side to side.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Oh, isn't that lovely," they cried in raptures.

"Let me try it on, Molly," begged Shirley.

"No, no," and Molly drew her hand hastily away. "Roger placed it there, and it's not coming off," a happy flush surmounting her cheeks. And to hide her confusion, she continued: "Now, then, about the wedding."

"Oh, yes, tell us about that," cried Shirley excitedly. "Will it be soon?"

"No," answered Molly, shaking her head, "not for a long time. You see, Roger is just getting two hundred a month, and has to save for a year and a half yet, then we'll be married. You'll both be bridesmaids and Dorothy flower girl."

"Oh, won't that be jolly?" cried Betty, again clapping her hands.

"Yes," went on Molly, "it's all so wonderful. I'm so excited. Roger and I have been such friends since—let me see—since the military ball."

"Oh, yes," said Shirley, "that's the one he took Maxine to."

"You want to look out for that minx," spoke up Betty. "Remember last month Roger had that little card party at his place, you developed a cold and couldn't go? Well, that night Maxine trailed after him all evening. His mother brought in a lovely Persian cat to show us, that someone had given her, and Maxine grabbed Roger by the arm, leaned her head over until I declare her hair brushed his face, while she said with that affected droll in her voice: 'Oh, Roger, I want to see the cat'."

"Yes," added Shirley hastily, "and Betty whispered to Cliff, 'Give her a looking-glass.' Roger's dad was just passing and

THE POWER OF GOLD

heard her, for he winked and laughed at Betty. But you should worry, you're engaged now, anyway. I would like to see her expression when she hears."

"I'm simply not thinking of her at all," said Molly placidly. "I'm so happy—and say, we sat out two or three dances in that little conservatory adjoining the ballroom and planned for the future. Roger told me what a pretty place Dr. Black said it was. Roger spoke of it as 'our little home in the west.' He said it was just like a cozy little nest, and when we came out to the ballroom again the orchestra was playing that piece, 'The West, a Nest and You'."

"My, how appropriate," exclaimed Betty.

"Yes, wasn't it?" replied Molly. "It quite thrilled us. We said we would always look on that as our piece. Roger is going to get two records of it, one for me and one for himself to take away with him. There is a gramophone in the bungalow, so he is going to take a lot of records with him. Now, girls, I must go to bed, it is terribly late and I really should not have come in at all, but I just had to tell you the good news, I couldn't wait till morning."

"Good night, old dear," said Shirley affectionately, "and I am glad you are engaged."

"I am, too," said Betty, in a warm, sincere tone.

But when the door closed after Molly, Shirley, with a thoughtful expression on her face, said:

"It is lovely for Molly to get married, and we all love Roger—only it will be lonely not to have her home with us—the first break in the family. It makes me feel sad to think of it."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Then for pity's sake don't think," said Betty, with a tremor creeping into her own voice. "You wouldn't want the girl to be an old maid, would you?"

"Oh, Betty," said Shirley, "you don't need to talk. Why, your own eyes are filled with tears."

"Well, I don't care," said Betty gloomily, wiping them with the corner of the white spread. "They are tears of joy—at least, some of them are."

* * * * *

The evening before Roger left for Selfridge Bay, he and Molly spent in the Wainwright living-room. It was a teeming wet night, and although the first week in April, the weather was quite chilly. Roger had bid Margaret and the girls good-bye, and the family considerably retired early. Now, alone together, Roger closed the door and reseated himself by Molly in front of the fire.

"Your mother seems to have the knack of making any room homelike. Take this one, now. It's one of the most comfortable rooms I know of."

"Yes," replied Molly, "Mother is a wonder in that respect. She says housekeeping is her 'career' and she is going to follow it to the best of her ability, only she doesn't speak of it as house-keeping—calls it home-making."

"Oh, is that it?" and Roger got up to draw the chesterfield close to the fire and, putting his arm around Molly, said, "Come, dear, let's sit on the chesterfield," and he led her over where she curled up in Roger's arm, while he drew her close to him, saying:

"Molly, dearest, it just seems unbelievable that this is our last

THE POWER OF GOLD

night together for a year and a half."

"Oh, Roger, don't you think you can come down next Christmas? Why, this is only the middle of April, and it doesn't seem even as late on in the season, with all this cold, wet weather. Roger, if you could only get down then, it wouldn't be so bad. Don't you think they would let you off for a week even?"

"No, darling, there is no chance. Black said they want a man whom they can depend on being on hand constantly. It does seem a long time, honey, but it can't be helped. We must write often, that's the thing. Keep in touch with each other in that way. I'll be saving every month and we'll have two thousand dollars a year from Christmas. Then I'll get off for two weeks. Of course, dear, there is just a slim chance that it won't be so long, only I don't want either of us to build too much on the hopes of a shorter time and then be disappointed, don't you see, dearest? Then we'll be married and I'll take you back," and Roger kissed again and again the soft, warm cheek, the rosy lips and the white curve of her throat.

"Roger, do you think anything could ever come between us, dear?" and Molly slipped her slim white arms around his neck.

"No, no, honey, I don't," and he laid his cheek against her hair and patted the arm that was encircling his broad shoulders. "You little pessimist, why do you say such a thing, darling?"

"I don't mean to be pessimistic, Roger, dear, but you know, people sometimes draw away from one another. You have heard of such things, haven't you?"

"Yes, I admit I have, Molly, but never when they care for each other so entirely, so intensely, as we do. I am not saying,

THE POWER OF GOLD

dearest, as the old worn-out statement goes, 'There never was a love like ours,' 'No one ever loved so before,' because I believe they have, lots of them. Your father and mother, for instance. They have spent over a quarter of a century of, no doubt, very happy years together, and I am quite positive nothing could change their love. Their affection has proven strong enough to weather all sorts of storms.

"My parents, too—Dad and Mother don't always think alike, they often have different viewpoints, but, dear me, they are like fish out of water if either of them is away for a week or two. The boys and I have often laughed at Dad when he comes in at night. It's 'Where's your Mother?' first thing, and no matter if she is ridding out the attic, he'll tramp up. I think it is one of the most beautiful things life holds, Molly dear—a deep, true love like that, the happiness of close companionship, the home life, the unlimited interest one's children brings, and then the growing old together is the crowning glory of it all."

A long silence, and then Molly, turning slightly to look up into Roger's face, smiled and said softly:

"Those are lovely thoughts, Roger, but aren't you a tiny little bit afraid of someone alienating the affection of either one of us; that is, before we are married? Of course, when two people are married and living together, it is quite different. Their interests are mutual then, but as we are, is it not possible, are you not afraid of it, Roger?"

"No, darling," smiled Roger, "I certainly am not," bending to kiss the upturned face. "I am absolutely positive. It's impossible, so far as I am concerned, and," he murmured, a more serious

THE POWER OF GOLD

note creeping into his voice as, holding Molly's face in his hands, he looked steadily into her clear, bright eyes, "as for you, my darling girl, I would just as soon think of my own mother turning from me, ceasing to love me, as that you would; I have unbounded faith in your constancy, your genuine sincerity, and I know my confidence has not been misplaced."

Molly drew Roger's hand to her lips, then, resting her head on his shoulder, breathed:

"Oh, Roger, I am so glad you feel and think so."

Then, as he tenderly smoothed back the soft, brown hair, kissing the white forehead, she resumed:

"Roger, you are right about no one or anything coming between us; we love each other too dearly to allow such a thing to happen. I won't let my thoughts dwell on such foolishness again."

"That's right, sweetheart," and Roger rose from the chesterfield, drawing Molly to her feet also, holding her tightly in his arms. "I must leave you now, darling. It is very late, our last evening together is over, but we'll write often, won't we, dear; we will keep in touch with each other constantly?"

"Yes, dearest," and Molly drew his head down to whisper: "Roger, I love you so. I do love you so."

"Oh, my darling, I know you do, and you know the depth of my love for you, don't you?" And once more he held her closely to him, kissing her over and over again. "Molly, dear, I know how hard this separation will be for us, but we must just both keep busy and look forward to the future. A year from next Christmas, darling, I'll come and take you back with me to our little home. It will truly be 'The west, a nest and you, dear'."

CHAPTER XII.

It was the middle of August. A hot, sultry day, the mid-summer sun beating down relentlessly on the little house where the Wainwrights tried in vain to keep cool.

In the winter the sun flooded the rooms and, despite their smallness and unattractiveness, it gave a feeling of cozy comfort. But now, in August, the rooms were suffocatingly hot; not a cool spot anywhere. Molly had taken chairs out to the tiny backyard, where, up beside the vegetable garden, they found enough space to sit under one solitary apple tree. The yard was small, but well kept. Margaret, with Philip's help, had put in a splendid patch of vegetables, which the family had taken turns at weeding and keeping in order. This proved a great help in stretching out Cliff's salary in order to at least eke out a livelihood. Molly and the girls had not yet been successful in getting positions, and today they were hot and discouraged, and a little worried, though Shirley said it was very hard to worry about anything sitting out in the shade of the apple tree. She felt lazy and drowsy; and, tilting the rocker far back, she settled herself comfortably, her feet perched on the rungs of Molly's chair, her eyes closed, leaving the conversation to Molly and Betty.

Little Dorothy, sitting on the grass, was busy dressing a baby doll. Philip and Margaret had taken Ronald to the art gallery to look at the pictures, which were always such a delight to both father and son. Betty had been out all morning hunting a position, which she hadn't found; and now, tired, hot and low-spirited,

THE POWER OF GOLD

she threw herself full length on the grass, her hands clasped under her head.

"Here's a cushion, honey," said Molly sympathetically, and she tossed Betty the cushion.

"Don't 'honey' me," said Betty with mock disapproval, pushing the cushion under her head and settling into a more comfortable position. "I'm as cross as a bear! Can't get a position; Mother and Dad looking sad; poor old Cliff wilting down at that dashed old factory."

"Yes, and at that, they are talking of closing the factory," Molly informed her.

"Whatever for?" said Shirley, looking up quickly.

"I don't know. Company's gone broke, I think," answered Molly with concern. "I knew it last week. Cliff told me. But for pity sake, don't let Mother or Dad know yet—not until we have to."

"In that case, where is Dorothy?" said Betty, looking around. "She will be letting the cat out of the bag if we are not careful."

"Oh, she is out of hearing," said Shirley, leaning back in her chair. "She's over there by the back fence, chasing the cat away; it was sitting on her best rag baby."

"I don't care where she is," continued Betty anxiously, "that child has an uncanny aptitude for gleaning information when you least expect it."

"You know, girls," said Molly, "I believe it is our own fault. Dorothy is a good, dependable little soul. If you tell her a secret, wild horses couldn't pull it from her. Now, for instance, when we moved here and didn't want Maxine Grahame to know

THE POWER OF GOLD

where we lived, she couldn't make Dorothy tell. In fact, I met Maxine on the street one day and she began by saying: 'What a queer little sister you have. She evidently didn't know where you lived. I saw her out playing in the park with some other little girls and I asked her where she lived, and all the answer I got was, "Oh, on a street near here." I said, "What street?" "Oh, the same one we lived on last week," and she went on playing, said no more, paying no more attention to me.'

"Queer, nothing!" cried Betty. "My, I dislike Maxine Grahame. She has no business pumping the child as to where we lived, and I hope you didn't tell her, Molly?"

"No; she got no more from me than from Dorothy, and I certainly let her know that Dotsy was not at all queer or stupid, either. But it just shows you, that if Dotsy is told not to tell, she certainly can keep a secret. She has, for me, a number of times. She is quick in her perception of anything. Hears and sees everything that goes on and uses a child's judgment. However, to get back to the subject of the factory closing—what are we to do, if it does? The furniture is all mortgaged and we girls evidently can't get positions. I have three weeks supply work promised for the first week in September, and also again in October, Mildred Ross wants me to supply for her then. You girls have nothing in sight."

"I'd say, move again," said Shirley.

"Move again?" exclaimed Betty. "What nonsense! You would think we were gypsies, the way we flit from place to place."

"Oh, Moll, look at Dorothy!" cried Shirley. "She's fighting with that little boy in the lane."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Dot," cried Molly, jumping and running to the back gate, "come here this minute," and she brought Dorothy in and securely tied the gate. "Shame on you, quarreling with the neighbor's children."

"I don't care!" creamed Dorothy. "He was making my cat fight his dog."

"Hush," said Molly; and "Sh, sh," whispered Shirley and Betty, "his mother will hear you. She has come to the door."

"Sh, sh," repeated Molly again.

"I won't 'she, she'," cried Dotsy, while the girls tried to smother their laughter at the child's pronunciation of the "sh" they were endeavoring to quiet her with.

"He's a bad, wicked boy, and I would like to cut him up and put salt on him," cried Dotsy, louder than ever.

"Molly, take her in the house and put her in your clothes closet," advised Betty with a grin.

"I certainly will! Come, you naughty girl, come right in with me," and Molly picked her up and carried her in, amid a series of kicks and screams.

But when ten minutes later Molly went to take her out she returned laughing to her sisters.

"That young monkey," she began, "when I opened the door—of course, it wasn't locked—I asked her if she wanted to come out, but she protested she didn't. I said, 'Come on, be Molly's good little girl.' But she shook her head and blurted out, 'I won't be a dood little girl, and I don't want to tum out, 'cause I've pitted on your dress, and I've pitted on your best hat, and I pitted on your shoes, and I'm just waiting for more pit'."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Isn't she the limit!" laughed Betty. "Fancy her spitting on your things like that!"

"Where is she now?" asked Shereley.

"Oh, I gave her a piece of bread and butter and she is coming right out, but don't let on I told you. I gave her a little heart-to-heart talk and the next think I knew she had taken her very best handkerchief—the one she prizes so much—and was rubbing everything she had spit on. 'There, now,' she said, 'I wubbed it all off, Molly.' Then I asked her why she took her very best handkerchief. "'Cause to make me feel better. I deserved to take it, Molly.'"

"Say, isn't she the queer youngster!" and Betty smiled as Dorothy emerged from the house with a piece of bread, and went on playing as though nothing had happened.

Presently Molly called the child to her.

"What you want, Molly?" and she got up reluctantly.

"I'll tell you what I want," said Molly, and took the little girl's hand in hers, looking down into the baby blue eyes. "You heard what we were saying awhile ago, didn't you?"

"Yep! Hard times and moving," said Dorothy quickly.

"Well, then, I don't want you to tell Mummy anything about it, see? Nor about the possibility of Cliff losing his position, either. You won't; now, will you, dear?"

"Don't need to," answered Dotsy, with her head on one side and shaking her curls, "'Cause Mummy knows he's lost it already. Know more 'n 'at, too. Knows where we're going to move. Mummy and Daddy took me yesterday when they went for a walk. It's a terrible house, too."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"What, worse than this?" cried Betty, sitting bolt upright, looking incredulously at Dorothy, while Shirley and Molly both gaped at the child.

"Worser than this!" scornfully replied Dorothy. "Whole lots worser. It's only a little, wee, tiny place, wif no hall in it and only four rooms and no baff tub, and all old dirty paper on the walls, and all old dirty houses around; and when Daddy wasn't looking, Mummy cried a little. It was when he went to see if 'er was any basement, and 'er wasn't one, either, only a horrid old shed. Daddy said it was a woodshed. But I heard Daddy say the house was only ten dollars a monff. A man went wiff us and Daddy gave him ten dollars, and Cliff can't go to work 'cause the place is going to be all locked up. Daddy said he would sell some of the furniture, only it was all mordgaged—somefing like 'at."

During this recital, Dorothy talked in a quick rush of words, as though she wanted to get it all out as quickly as possible. The girls looked from one to the other amazed.

"Well, I never!" ejaculated Shirley. "If that isn't the—the—"

"Devil," supplemented Betty. "Fancy the family affairs settled already and without even as much as mentioning it. Wonder why they didn't tell us?"

"Just because they don't like us to know the worst, till the very last minute," said Molly with emphasis. "Poor Mother would do most anything to spare you children the slightest care or anxiety if she could. Dad, too; he feels that it is all his fault. I am more sorry for him than any of us."

"My, I wish I could get my hands on that man who sold him

THE POWER OF GOLD

those shares," frowned Betty, with a look of grim determination. "He would wish he had died before he was born."

"Sh, sh," admonished Molly.

"I'm like Dotsy, I won't 'She'," mimicked Betty.

"Oh, here comes Cliff," cried Dorothy, as she ran towards the back lane once more, this time to be hoisted up to Cliff's broad shoulders, where she sat waving her arms around while he carried her back to the girls.

"Well, how is everything?" he asked, putting Dorothy on the ground, and sitting down himself beside Betty on the grass, while Dorothy ran after her kitten. As soon as she was out of sight and hearing, which, as Betty remarked, was the main thing, they acquainted Cliff with the next proposed change in the family affairs.

"Well," sighed Cliff, when Betty deplored most strenuously the fact of the cheap little house Dorothy had told them about, "what are you going to do about it? We have to live, and me being let out now is most unfortunate."

"Good thing it's summer time," commented Shirley. "We don't need much fuel, only a little for cooking."

"Yes," agreed Cliff, "our living isn't much, but yet it's something. I'm going down to the docks and try for a job. It's serious, that's what it is. We have nothing in the bank; it's six months since we took the mortgage out on the furniture; the four hundred is all gone, and my fifty dollars only paid the rent and my car fare. I don't believe I spent two dollars for anything else. However, the fact of the matter is the four hundred is gone. Besides, Mother has sold all the jewelry she ever possessed, all the little

THE POWER OF GOLD

trinkets you girls had, and Mother is now going to sell her fur coat and the table linen. That will at least pay for the moving and feed us in the meantime, till I get something to do."

"In two weeks time," said Molly, "I have a week's supply that will bring us twenty dollars. It's supply for Bessie Roy, in the bank. She gets eighty a month and she might take two weeks."

"Fine," spoke Shirley encouragingly, "that would be forty dollars and if we only have to pay ten for rent—"

"We can manage," Molly said. "We'll get through alright, and we must all be as bright and cheerful as we can, for Mother and Dad's sake."

"Well, I must trot along," and Cliff rose from the grass. "I'll have a bite to eat and then go down to the docks and see what I can find in the stevedore line."

"Isn't it terrible," said Shirley, "to think of our poor Cliff having to work at the docks?"

"It is," answered Molly. "If only we girls could get something to do!"

"Yes," said Betty, "and how thankful I am that we both passed our matriculation—not even a sup to take for either of us."

"I'm thankful," said Molly, "that Roger isn't going to be home this summer. I wouldn't have him see us in such a cheap, poor place for anything."

"Why should you care?" asked Betty. "If he thinks enough of you, he wouldn't mind."

"No," replied Molly, "but I would. I don't want him to know of our poverty. Furthermore, he would never be able to understand Dad buying those shares. He would just think he was a

THE POWER OF GOLD

poor business man, and Roger's father has been so successful. He has put Roger through college, has the other son, Jack, attending military school, and Roland, the youngest, is in the university."

"So would our Dad be just as successful if his grandfather had let him be an artist," loyally declared Betty.

"Oh, I know," hastily replied Molly, "but I don't want him to know we're so poor. I'm not ashamed of it—but—"

"I know," said Shirley. "You're not ashamed of it, yet you don't feel that it is any credit to us, either. I know how you feel, Moll."

"How is Roger getting along?" inquired Betty.

"Fine! Busy all the time, and that Chinaman is so funny. You know, Roger took 'our piece' up—'The West, a Nest and You'—and nearly every night, especially if Roger is feeling a bit tired, Chung puts on that record. He says: 'Alla samee, vely nice piece. Bossy man likes him vely much, me savvy. Alla same, me put on piece, Bossy man drop paper, close eyes, look heap happy. Me savvy'."

The girls thought that a huge joke. They had never had anything to do with Chinamen, and thought it all so interesting.

"Roger said in his last letter," Molly continued, "that Doctor Ellis had written him for our address. Said he would like to come and see us and take Shirley out."

"Did he, really?" asked Shirley, blushing furiously; whereby Betty laughly said:

"Poor Shirley! A budding romance spoiled by high financing."

"I should call it spoiled by low finances," smiled Molly.

"Well, financing or finances, it was a 'fine' romance, anyway,"

THE POWER OF GOLD

said Betty. "Never mind, he may come in search of Cinderella again some day and bring along the golden slipper, or was it glass? It matters not, so long as you don't let him 'slip' away from you."

"What about yourself, Betty Wainwright?" Shirley reversed the teasing. "I'm sure Jack Ross paid enough attention to you those Friday nights when we went skating and tobogganing."

"Say, girls, doesn't that seem ages ago?" said Molly.

"You bet it does," answered Betty. "But Jack Ross—bah! Nice enough chap; wouldn't hold my interest, though. No, I guess I'll be the old maid of the family. My prince charming has never been born and his mother's dead; so, you see—hopeless, isn't it? But you girls can bring all your forty-eleven children and their Aunt Betty will mind them for you. I should worry! But, say, let me tell you, I did see an awfully nice man once when I went out to hunt for a job one day. He was wonderful!"

"Don't say job," corrected Molly. "Say position."

"Alright, position," grimaced Betty. "Only I wasn't in a 'position' to get it. He was tall and dark—even taller than Roger; and thin, quite thin; and the least bit grey at the temples. But a very young face—I should say, not much past thirty."

"Who was he?" Shirley questioned, immediately interested.

"Mr. Milton Harwood, of Harwood & Company, a big dry-goods firm. They advertised. But I got it mixed. It was a male clerk they wanted. Guess I must have read it wrong. However, I went in and the floorwalker showed me into Mr. Harwood's office. A wonderful office, all beautifully furnished, just off the main offices. And there he sat, writing at his desk, handsome as a picture. And when I saw how young he was, I took stage fright.

THE POWER OF GOLD

Was just in the act of quietly sneaking out when he looked up and smiled—oh, such a captivating smile—and said: ‘Just a moment.’ So, of course, I was obliged to sit down again and wait till he was finished. When he sealed the letter he was writing, he turned and asked me what it was I wished to speak to him about; and when I told him it was about a position he explained my mistake, but took my name and address. Said he certainly would let me know the very first vacancy there was.”

“And so,” said Molly, “he has been Prince Charming in your thoughts ever since?”

“Talk about romance! There you have it,” spoke Shirley hopefully. “I wonder if he will remember. Perhaps he might send for you some day.”

“Yes, and then again he might not,” sighed Betty. “I’m not letting my hopes fly too high, for there’s a ‘fly’ in the ointment. You see he wouldn’t have a thing to do with one of his shop girls, anyway.”

CHAPTER XIII.

It was with the greatest relief that Margaret heard, through Cliff, that the girls knew of the little house being rented. Indeed, she wondered if they really minded or were very much concerned, so light-hearted and happy they appeared; and as the day of the moving drew near, it was quite a jolly trio who helped their mother sort out and pack the household goods.

But Molly's spirits drooped when, for the first time, she viewed the little place. She had gone up with Cliff the day prior to the moving, carrying a few odds and ends, which were not convenient to pack, and as they left the tram car at the corner and walked down the narrow little street to the far end of the block, they passed row after row of unpainted, cheap terraces; row upon row of ill-kept, untidy cottages; numerous dirty-faced, ragged children playing in the gutter; a few larger boys playing ball on the road. Molly instinctively caught Cliff by the sleeve, shuddering. "Oh, dear, we can't live here, Cliff; it's awful. I had no idea! Fancy Dorothy and Don playing with those children."

"It is certainly a poor neighborhood," replied Cliff, with a serious look in his eyes. "I've been over several times, and I see more squalor each trip I make, but we simply can't help ourselves. It would have been so much better if Dad hadn't mortgaged the furniture. We could have sold it piece by piece, as the occasion demanded. Think what it costs to move the stuff. Well, here we are," and he turned towards the little square cottage which had once upon a time been painted brown, though now it was

THE POWER OF GOLD

almost impossible to stretch one's imagination to the fact. The only thing Molly noticed was that the fence stood up intact, while all the other fences had most of the pickets missing, and only one or two posts left, the reason being, as Cliff explained to her, that their father had been working for days trying to get things into better condition. The garden—what there was of it—was entirely overgrown with weeds; but, like the fence, could be whipped into a little better shape.

They walked up to the tiny porch, which drooped dejectedly down in front, the gutters completely gone. Cliff unlocked the front door and they entered a small square room, approximately ten by ten feet. "A fair-sized hall," remarked Molly.

"Hall?" exclaimed Cliff. "Why, this is the parlor! There is no hall. Here," opening a door to the left, "is a bedroom. It's the same size as the parlor, and will have to be Mother's and Dad's room. Then here," as he led the way to a room at the rear of it, through a small door, "is the dining-room."

"Oh," said Molly, astonished, "the dining-room off Mother's bedroom?"

"Yes, Molly, and here is the kitchen"; and they entered a room somewhat larger than the others, and with two windows looking out on the tiny backyard. It was much lighter than the rest of the house.

"Here is a small woodshed," went on Cliff, "and between that and the kitchen, a very small bathroom. Dad is going to paint it. He did the kitchen. It was awful before—hardly livable. But paint costs money, so he has given it just one coat; it needed more, but we couldn't afford it. That's why we left the other rooms."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Oh, they're not so bad," said Molly, "but the wallpaper is hideous, besides being dirty."

"It's not as dirty as it was. We brushed it off as well as we could and washed both floors and woodwork. You should have seen it when Dad and I came over the other day—it simply beggared description."

"I don't doubt it, Cliff. No wonder Dorothy said Mother cried. I knew it must be pretty bad when it drove Mummy to tears. So this is all there is to the place, besides that tacked-on summer kitchen and bathroom?"

"Yes," answered Cliff, "just this square, as you might call it, then the summer kitchen and bathroom, which was evidently, as you say, tacked on after the cottage had been up a while."

"We mustn't complain, for Dad's sake, too," added her brother earnestly. "As I've often said, this is harder on Dad than any of us, because he blames himself."

"Yes, yes, Cliff, I know. Poor old Dad. We mustn't even hint that we hold him responsible for our fallen fortunes. Come on, Cliff, let's go home. I want to talk to the girls."

While Cliff was locking the front door, a wee boy, about four years of age, toddled up to swing on the gate.

"Is you going to live in at 'er house?" he questioned, as Molly passed him.

"Yes, I guess so. Where do you live, little boy?"

"I live over dere in dat dere pink house," pointing a dirty finger towards a bright yellow cottage across the street, whose owner had evidently gotten busy with the paint brush, but hopeless in his choice of colors, had left the house, when finished,

THE POWER OF GOLD

an atrocious yellow, with paddy green trimmings. Molly looked at the house and laughed. "Do you live there? Pretty house, isn't it?"

"Huh, huh," replied the boy. "My paw, he painted it. We used to live in this here house 'at youse going to live in. When I had a Carlot Teaver my maw, she keepeed me in a bed 'cause I had a rash all over me everywhere, my ears an' all."

"What's the kid saying?" laughed Cliff, as he joined Molly at the gate.

"Bless me, I can't make it out," replied Molly. "Something about him having a rash that he called Carlot Teaver, whatever that is. Are they not dirty looking youngsters, Cliff? Why on earth can't people keep their children clean, even if they are poor?"

When they reached home the packing was nearly finished, and Betty was lying full length on the living-room couch, with Shirley sitting on the floor, playing jacks with Dorothy.

"Well, old dears," began Betty, as Molly and Cliff entered the room, "what is the new domicile like? Is there a fireplace in the drawing-room, dining-room and den, and has my room a view?"

"View? I should say," answered Molly. "A view of dirty windows in the house next door, about two and a half feet away."

"Hm," said Betty, "is there running water in all the rooms?"

"There is in the kitchen. The tap leaks. Cliff tried to fix it—turn it off—but it was still dripping when we left."

"Speaking of running water reminds me," spoke Cliff, "of the time, a year ago, when we were hunting a house; Betty was with us, and the agent took us to a house where Mother thought there

THE POWER OF GOLD

wasn't a cement basement. The agent assured us there was, emphasizing the fact of it being a full cement basement, whereupon we all started down the stairs to be convinced, but didn't get far, for there was fully a foot of water over the floor, so when we went back up again Betty said, with disgust, 'My word, that sure is a full basement alright,' and the agent just looked at her with his mouth open. But he hasn't seen through that remark yet. And still they say it's only an Englishman who can't see a joke."

* * * * *

The moving took place on Thursday, and by Saturday night everything was ship-shape. Molly, Shirley and Betty made the best of things, not failing to show Margaret the bright side by pointing out the fact of the close proximity to the street cars.

"Just one block," remarked Shirley, "and we were a good three blocks before. Also, Mother, you'll have lots of time, when we all get positions, to try plain sewing; that is, if you really want to; and with low rent—why, it won't be any time till, as Dad puts it, we'll be on our feet financially." Whereupon her mother smiled and patted the golden head, murmuring:

"Oh, yes, we shall manage, little daughter."

The greatest difficulty presenting itself was to find space to hold the household effects. The only solution was to pack all furniture that was not in use and put it in the summer kitchen, and as it was the middle of September, with the weather cooler, the stove was placed in the kitchen proper, the room being converted into kitchen, sitting-room and dining-room combined, leaving the tiny

THE POWER OF GOLD

parlor, bedroom and dining-room for sleeping quarters. The boys took the parlor, as it opened on to the front porch, and the three girls the dining-room. The bedroom off the parlor was reserved for their father and mother.

After things settled to normal, Molly had her two weeks' supply work, which paid for the moving. Cliff had temporary work at the docks, which kept them supplied with each day's needs. With the exception of that, there was nothing. The girls hunted day by day to find employment—anywhere and any sort of work, but without success. The future certainly looked dark.

It was a very worried household these days. Affairs were going from bad to worse, and as Betty gloomily informed the family one night at supper, it was two months since she began looking for work, and nothing in sight.

"I have not heard from any of those firms yet; and no less than five promised to let me know when there was a vacancy. Several said they expected there would be in a short time and would send me word."

"Never mind, Betty, dear," comforted Margaret. "We are going through a hard siege, no doubt, but the hard paths of life are character developers, you know."

"Gosh," declared Betty, "we must be a wonderfully developed family by now. For my part, I would rather have a little more to eat, and I wouldn't worry about the development of my character."

"Nevertheless," resumed Margaret, "it is the attitude we assume towards these trials that determines whether they are to prove a blessing or the reverse. That is why some are mellowed

THE POWER OF GOLD

by adversity, while others become hard and cynical."

"You are right there, Margaret," said Philip, smiling at his wife. "What you say is quite true, only I can't somehow live up to the 'spirit of my convictions.' Like Betty, I would rather have the wherewithall to provide for my family."

"Well, I think to be in straightened circumstances and work one's way out certainly tends to increase one's moral fortitude," spoke Cliff. "What do you think, Molly?"

"I don't know. I'm more concerned over Ronny. He has gone to bed without his supper, and he hadn't any lunch, either, did he, Mother?"

"No," answered her Mother. "He seems to be ill and feverish. I've given him some medicine and tucked him up comfy. No doubt he will be alright tomorrow—a little stomach disorder, I presume."

"Not from too much food, I'll say," remarked Betty, dryly.

But poor Ronny was not better in the morning. All night he tossed and talked incoherently of England, their old home; his pets he had left there; then it was his painting. Several times Cliff rose to get him a cold drink or put a wet cloth on his burning brown. About six o'clock the lad seemed to be sleeping quietly. Cliff dressed, lit the kitchen fire and woke his mother. As a rule he prepared his own breakfast and went down to the docks to work, but this morning he was worried about Ronald. After Margaret had been in to see the child his worry was not lessened, for she came out to the kitchen looking extremely alarmed.

"We must have the doctor at once, Cliff. I'll awaken your father and send him. You go on to work."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"What do you think is the trouble, Mother?" asked Cliff, as she hastily poured him a cup of tea.

"I don't know. But this I do know—he is a very sick boy. Why, he scarcely knew me when I went over him!"

"Hm, that's too bad, but Dad will have a doctor here soon and it may not be as bad as we think; so don't worry, Mother," and he bent to kiss her good-bye.

"I do, though, Cliff. When it's Ronny I can't help it; he seems such a frail child."

"I know it," replied Cliff, and left with a heavy heart. Ron had always been particularly dear to him. Perhaps it was because he was his only brother, or perhaps it was on account of the frailness of the child that caused Cliff to have such a tenderness towards him.

All day, as he worked, the little fevered face was before him. At last the day was over and he turned homeward only to be confronted, when he reached the gate, with a red sign tacked in place beside the doorway. Molly, who stood by the front window, evidently watching for him, came to the door, a shawl thrown over her shoulders; for, though only the middle of September, the air was cold and it rained dismally.

"You are not to come in," she called to Cliff. "Don't come any nearer than the steps," as he advanced toward her. "Yes, it's scarlet fever." Cliff was looking mutely towards the red card.

"Do you remember that child who tried to talk to us the day we came here? Well, he was trying to say he had had scarlet fever when they lived here. The neighbors have told us, and apparently the little chap's mother had never called a doctor, hence

THE POWER OF GOLD

the place was not fumigated. Poor Mother is blaming herself because she didn't have it fumigated."

"It would have been better, I suppose, but none of us thought of it, so it can't be helped. How is Ron?" asked Cliff anxiously.

"Oh, in a terrible fever. The doctor says we can't tell how he will be yet. Of course, we are all in quarantine—all but Dad. He said for you to meet him down there two blocks, at that old grey boarding house. It is an awful place, but I guess it will have to do."

"Anything will do, Molly. In fact, even that is more than we can afford."

"I expect it is, Cliff, though Dad has a job at one of the woodyards, just for a short time. One of the men is ill, so they took Dad on. You go along now and meet him. I must go in; it's cold out here. The doctor said you could talk to us through the window and also leave any supplies on the porch. I do hope Dotsy won't take it!"

"Make her stay in the kitchen," called Cliff, as Molly opened the front door to go in.

But keeping Dorothy in the kitchen was easier said than done. They moved Ron to his mother's room, where, for weeks, he lay hovering between life and death.

Every evening Cliff and his father would come and talk a few minutes through the sitting-room window, leaving supplies, such as were required, on the porch.

At last the crisis was over and gradually the little lad regained his strength, and in six weeks the doctor pronounced him "peeled," and the quarantine was lifted.

THE POWER OF GOLD

Saturday night, after the fumigation was over, antiseptic baths given and all other precautions taken, Cliff and his father once more joined the family group; and, indeed, it was a most happy reunion, Betty saying joyfully, as they all took their places around the supper table in the kitchen: "Well, here we are, our darling little convalescent brother and all!"

"Yes," replied their mother, smiling, "it is so splendid that Ron is better and Dorothy didn't take it; though it was so hard to keep her away from him."

"Oh, I didn't go too near him," spoke up Dorothy; "and Molly sprinkled lots of 'at aunty-step-stink around, so a germs wouldn't jump at me."

"What did Daddy's little girl do all day?" asked Philip, looking tenderly towards the child.

"I played wif my dollies, and Shirley told me stories about fairies and giants; an' Molly read to me—when she had time; an' Betty teased me. So 'at all kept me busy."

"I'll wager Betty teased you," grinned Cliff. "That's her best stock-in-trade—teasing."

"Never mind," said Margaret, "Betty kept our spirits up, anyway; a most important item."

"At first I thought the time would never pass," spoke Molly. "It was dreadful! But one gets used to anything. I suppose, as Mother says, 'the back is fitted for the burden'."

"It didn't seem so long to me," spoke up little Ron. "When I was awful sick I thought I was in England all the time, and then I woke up and heard the doctor say, 'I'm afraid Ronny is not going to get better, Mrs. Wainwright.' And then I thought: 'Well,

THE POWER OF GOLD

I'm only a little boy and can't earn much money and the family would have more to eat, so—' ”

“Oh, don't, don't, honey!” and Betty, her eyes filling fast, leaned over to where he sat beside her, giving him a hug and a kiss. “Don't tell us any more what you thought. We can easily guess.”

“We certainly can,” said his mother, as she wiped her eyes. “Nothing in the world would make up for you, Ronny, dear! But let's change the subject. Here is Shirley, quiet as a mouse all through the meal. What's on your mind, little daughter?”

“I've just been thinking,” began Shirley, slowly and thoughtfully, “of the last meal we had together, when we were all so blue and forlorn because no positions were available. Now we're just as poor—nothing in sight for any of us, and yet we are happy and light-hearted—all because Ronny is well again, and didn't die. It just shows we should not be so down-hearted when we all have our health and are together.”

“That's right, my girl,” answered her father. “After all, it's the close companionship and love in the home that is the most essential factor in our lives.”

CHAPTER XIV.

The crisp October days had come and gone; likewise passed November, with its hail and sleet, and the first week in December found the ground covered with more than a foot of snow.

One clear, cold afternoon Margaret sat in her clean, warm kitchen—her husband often complimented her on her knack of making the most barren room attractive—and Margaret, like every other woman, loved praise from her husband, putting forth her best efforts to always make home as pleasant a place as possible, and when her family returned in the evening, a warm, well-cooked dinner awaited them, though oftentimes the fare was scanty, for it seemed to her, as the days went by, that there was less and less to do with. Time and again she went without in order that there might be more for the others.

This particular afternoon she sat beside the kitchen window with her little English hand machine placed on a table, while on a similar table close by lay a number of children's rompers, almost completed. Her fingers flew as she stitched and hemmed, only stopping from time to time to replenish the fire burning cheerily in the shiny cook stove.

In the backyard, Ron and Dorothy were making a snowman, and at intervals called their mother to look; and Margaret, glancing from the window, would smile and nod without scarcely a pause in her work. Finally the sun slowly sank in the west; still Margaret worked on, with almost feverish haste. She must hurry—work faster—it would soon be dark. The evening shadows were

THE POWER OF GOLD

already falling, night dropped so quickly once the sun went down.

The children—quite time for them to come in. What was there for the family's supper in case the rompers could not be finished? Margaret got up from the chair by the window, and crossing the room, opened the cupboard door. Half a loaf of bread and a very small piece of butter on a saucer—that was all. Picking up the tea caddy, she tipped it sideways. Yes, there was a spoonful of tea. How she would enjoy a cup of tea now! There had been such a very light lunch—just a piece of bread and butter, spread very lightly; no tea. What little there was should be kept for supper in case the rompers were not finished. But she must get more than that for her poor, hungry family. Yes, better work harder, finish the rompers. And Margaret returned to her chair with renewed efforts, renewed determination. She couldn't let them go hungry! Oh, if only some of them would get work. Cliff had been laid off for more than two weeks now, and it might be Christmas before he would be taken on again. Philip had driven for the woodyard, off and on, for more than two months; but, as Betty put it, it was more off than on. The three girls were without employment at all, but still relentless in their endeavors to procure something—anything.

Yet, little as their resources were, Margaret had made both ends meet, herself securing a little sewing from time to time from a small company who ran a children's emporium some ten blocks away. They put out a cheap class of goods, consequently paid very little—only ten cents for each pair of rompers. Yet Margaret would have been glad to have spent most of her time sewing at

THE POWER OF GOLD

even that small price. But it was only when the firm was rushed that she was able to obtain work at all.

Today she had ten pairs, almost finished. That would be a dollar—a whole dollar! Margaret smiled in anticipation. Why, that would assure them a good hot dinner, with possibly something for the next day as well. But she would have to take the children with her to the emporium; couldn't leave them here alone. Better let them remain playing outside till the rompers were finished. Finally, it was too dark to sew any longer by daylight. Hastily she drew the blinds and lit the gas. Just as she sewed on the last button and folded the last romper the front door opened and Molly, walking slowly through the front room, entered the kitchen—tired, worn and thin, but still smiling courageously as she stooped to kiss her mother.

"Molly, dear, I am so glad you are home. I must take these rompers up to the store. They're all finished."

"Shall I go with them, Mother, before I take off my coat?"

"No, thank you, dear. To tell the truth, I'm so tired sewing I think a nice brisk walk will do me good. Call the children, Molly, they should have been in long ago. I'll go now and put my things on."

"Very well, Mother, and then I will make you a cup of tea," answered Molly, as she put her hat and coat away in the bedroom. "Now you get ready and I'll have tea made in a jiffy. I shall take a cup with you, too, I'm nearly starved."

"Didn't you have any lunch, dear?" called Margaret from her bedroom door.

"A little," answered Molly. "Betty had five cents and we

THE POWER OF GOLD

bought some buns. I got a promise of two days' work typing some envelopes in a real estate office, beginning tomorrow."

"Well, that is better than nothing," said her mother, brightly, emerging from her bedroom and taking up the cup of tea handed to her by Molly, along with two deliciously made pieces of toast. "This certainly tastes good," she said, sitting down at the kitchen table, while Molly took the chair opposite, relating the usual events of the day between sips of tea. How Betty had just been an hour late of getting a position in a candy store; of them meeting Doctor Ellis—Shirley had blushed so; the doctor had invited the three girls to go to tea with him, but Molly, thinking three too many, had come home, leaving Shirley and Betty to accompany him and hoping he would order plenty. They could make away with a good meal alright, as five cents worth of buns hadn't gone far in appeasing their hunger at lunch time.

"Poor kiddies," murmured Margaret. "They certainly didn't have much breakfast. But you girls shouldn't tease Shirley about the doctor, Molly. You know, dear, how we are placed. She can't possibly cultivate his friendship. Then, anyway, Shirley is just a child."

"Oh, I know, Mother," laughed Molly. "But she does blush so when we even speak of him, and when she happens to see him on the street—anywhere—oh, she is too funny! Betty and I nearly split, and, believe me, he is just as keen about her. How his face lit up when we saw him. He scarcely took his eyes off her."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Margaret, as she rose hurriedly. "Don't tell me any more. Here I am sitting drinking tea and chatting

THE POWER OF GOLD

with you, and nothing for dinner. Call those children in. I do believe they would stay out all night if you didn't. Have you a car ticket, dear? I'll take the car; it's too late to walk now."

"Yes, Mother, I have. It's much too far to walk in the snow, anyway. Here it is. I'll boil the kettle and set the table while you are gone."

When Mrs. Wainwright returned, in less than an hour, the family had not yet arrived. The children were playing school in the corner by the stove, and Molly was toasting the remainder of the bread.

"Here, dear," said her mother, "I got a dollar for the rompers and brought home some steak and a few potatoes, bread, a little butter and tea. I'll take off my things and help you get supper. They gave me some more rompers to do, too—twelve pairs, so that will at least keep the wolf from the door."

"What wolf?" blusteringly called Betty, as she and Shirley breezed in the front door, stamping the snow off their feet. "Here are two wolves, famished, too," continued Betty, coming into the kitchen.

"I like that," laughingly replied Molly, putting the meat in the frying pan. "I thought I left you two with Doctor Ellis to have tea?"

"Bah!" retorted Betty, disgustedly, "tea and little cakes! I could have eaten them all up in one bite, licked the plate and chewed up the tablecloth, I was so hungry. But I refrained. I don't like chewing the rag in public. And say, we had the hardest time preventing the doctor from seeing us home. He wanted our address so badly. We had to keep making one excuse after another."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Yes," added Shirley, as she took off her coat and hung it up, "he tried to find out where we lived. Invited us to go skating, but we said we hadn't any skates. Didn't tell him we sold them. Then he invited us to the theatre. I forget what excuse we made to that. Then he became very quiet and didn't say any more about seeing us again. Just bid us good-bye and left us. I know he thought it queer."

CHAPTER XV.

Christmas was drawing near. The weather had turned bitterly cold, the snowdrifts piled high, and though often cold and hungry, the Wainwrights struggled on, meeting each day with renewed hope and courage. But it was not until Christmas week that they began to really suffer want. The year had been a hard one, a continual struggle to keep ahead of the game; yet they had managed, but only by cutting down expenses to keep within their income. To eke out that income, they parted with everything but the dire necessities. Margaret sold all the linen and some of the bedding, leaving the family but a scant supply of the very poorest. Old pieces of blankets and quilts that had been used mainly for packing purposes were now unearthed, patched and mended, as best they could.

What hurt Margaret most was the "pawning" of her wedding and engagement ring; yet she smiled bravely when Philip questioned her about these. Why, yes, they were pawned, just for the time being. It wouldn't be long; things would be better in the new year. Even poor Molly, seeing such sacrifices on her mother's part, rose to the occasion, slipping off the solitaire Roger had placed on her finger, and handed it to her mother to take along with the others.

So they had lived from day to day, making the returns from these personal effects spin out as best they could, for not one of them had a position of any kind. Cliff and his father tramped the streets from morning till night, in hopes of a job, even shovel-

THE POWER OF GOLD

ing snow or packing in wood; but there seemed less than ever of such work. The holidays had begun and at house after house where they asked for employment, the answer was almost invariably, "The children will take in the wood"; and then again, "No, no snow to be shovelled, the children always do that." Then sometimes they were successful, returning home joyfully, to hand Margaret fifty cents or a dollar, as the case might be, and Margaret would cautiously dole it out, ten cents for potatoes, five cents for bread, a little tea and sometimes a bottle of milk—make it spin out—always keeping ten or fifteen cents back for the following day, for fear—!

She had written home telling her sisters something of their financial difficulties, and had even buried her pride and asked for a loan more than once. The first time had occurred when Cliff was out of work in the summer, and again when little Ronald was ill, and once again when it seemed almost impossible to pay the rent, as little as it was. Surprising how quickly it had mounted up! Thirty dollars was now due, for they were three months in arrears. The agent said they would have to move if it wasn't paid.

A letter had been sent off quickly to Maude, who cabled them a hundred dollars at once. All this helped. The rent paid, the remaining seventy dollars had gone to pay the doctor's bill for Ronald and medicine. These bills had been sent in repeatedly, until finally they had been given into the hands of a collector. Still their hopes were undaunted, Betty trying her utmost to joke, laugh it off, keep up the family spirits. Her mother, especially, was quick to imbibe the cheerful spirit from Betty, and frequently, when she seemed at the breaking point, Betty would make some

THE POWER OF GOLD

witty remark and Margaret, laughing in spite of herself, would take heart once more, returning at length to her usual cheerful manner. Ronald, too, with his big brown eyes, looking so solemn and wise, was wont to say:

"It doesn't really matter. We haven't been awfully hungry, and then we are all together, and have awfully nice times, so we won't worry yet."

One afternoon, the child speaking thusly, Betty leaned over from where she was sitting to pat his brown head:

"You bet, we won't, Little Pal! Not much, and Santa Claus is coming to us, too, isn't he, Sonny?"

"Sh, don't tell the child that," chided Cliff, in a whisper.

"Why not?" answered Betty, turning to Cliff. "There's two whole days left, and dear knows what may happen."

"Oh, I'm old enough to understand," said Ronald. "I don't care, really; but I do wish he would bring Dotsy something. She talks about it and says she wants a doll, and candy, and things, and wonders where we'll hang our stockings when there isn't a fireplace. She's going to be awfully disappointed if he doesn't come. Couldn't we do something, Betty?"

"Sure, we'll do something, Ronny!" the tears springing to Betty's eyes. "Santa Claus will come or I'll know the reason why! You can take my word for that. Go on out now, Ronny, and play in the yard. See, Dotsy is making a fort. Here's your coat." And she hustled the little lad out the back door, then turned to Cliff, the only one home. Margaret had gone up to the Emporium to see if they had any work for her; the girls had gone out with the hope of getting work in one of the smaller stores during

THE POWER OF GOLD

the rush hours of the Christmas shopping. Their father was out, as usual, searching incessantly for what might come his way. Only Cliff had remained home, the soles of his shoes having worn through, and he was vainly endeavoring to patch them up with bits of wood and cardboard. Betty turned to him now, as the door closed on Ronald:

"Cliff, what shall we do?" she began in a perplexed tone. "We can't let those poor kiddies go without Santa Clause, Christmas dinner and everything! Do suggest something."

"Don't ask me," replied Cliff, shaking his head. "I'm at my wits' end to know what to do; but it strikes me, Betty, if we can get them anything to eat we'll be doing well. What's in the house now?" he asked, as he laced the grotesquely mended shoes and stood up to reach for his coat and hat.

"There's not a thing but one loaf of bread and a little tea. No butter, milk—nothing! Not a gol-darn thing," she emphasized, "and it's nearly four o'clock in the afternoon, and tomorrow will be Christmas Eve, Cliff," she implored, as she turned to face him. "Couldn't you go to some of the old crowd—the Rosses or Roger's people, the Masons, or even Doctor Ellis—anyone we know—and borrow five dollars? Even two dollars would save the day! I could buy Dot a twenty-five cent doll, five cents of candy, and Ron a box of paints. His were lost when we moved, you know. He would be so delighted with even the cheapest kind. We could get a box of paints for twenty-five cents, and Mother could make them a feast with a whole dollar. Do, please, Cliff. Or if you won't, I will! I'll bury my pride and I'll go, for the children's sake," and she took hold of the lapels of her brother's coat and

THE POWER OF GOLD

looked pleadingly into his face. "Say something! Shall I do it?"

Cliff hesitated, then took her hands down and turned away.

"No, no, Betty, don't think of it, please! Why, it would just about kill Dad to have comparative strangers provide for his family at Christmas. No, it's not to be thought of. We'll manage somehow. I may get something to do this afternoon. I'm going out now."

But before he left the kitchen the front door opened and his father entered. Cliff knew instinctively that something unusual was amiss. "What is it, Dad?" he asked solicitously, as Philip reached for a chair and sat down heavily.

"What I have been fearing all along, my Son. That man has foreclosed on the furniture and is seizing it tomorrow."

"What?" cried Betty. "Our furniture! Do you mean he'll take it away?"

"Yes," replied her father. "It will about break your Mother's heart to part with all those things she has had so long. Lots of pieces came from her home when she was a child."

"Why," said Cliff, a perplexed frown wrinkling his forehead, "could you not even prevail on him to wait till after Christmas?"

"No, I couldn't, Cliff. You see we have moved twice since taking out the mortgage and to a smaller, cheaper house each time. Besides, it is months overdue. I took it out for three months in the first place. That's all the length of time he would lend us the money for, and now it is nine months."

"When did you see him?" questioned Cliff.

"He was just coming up the walk when I went out this morning. I tried my best to persuade him, then, to wait for a little while,

THE POWER OF GOLD

and he promised he would do nothing today. But I went to see him before coming home and he informed me that the drays would be here at eight tomorrow morning."

"But could he not leave it till after Christmas?" again asked Betty. "Could you not beg of him to, Dad?"

"Beg nothing!" answered her father with asperity. "I begged him to leave the kitchen stove, and he wouldn't."

"But he can't take the kitchen stove; we'll freeze!" cried Betty in dismay.

"Well, he says he will leave the stove if we give him twenty-five dollars—not less."

"That's abominable!" cried Cliff. "Come on, Dad, we'll go out and see what can be done about this. Surely there's something. Perhaps we can make arrangements about the stove, at least."

When the door closed on her father and Cliff, Betty sat down by the kitchen table, dropped her head on her arms and wept bitterly. This was too much. Instead of planning a better, nicer time for the youngsters, they would have nothing—nothing at all, not even a stove. The only means of keeping warm had to be taken from them.

Softly the back door opened and Ronald, mystified and awed at the sight of Betty weeping, crept quietly into the room and over to her chair.

"What's the matter, Betty, darling?" he asked, as he wrapped his little thin arms around her neck. "Don't cry. Tell me all about it, won't you, Betty, please?" he asked coaxingly. And from sheer stress of it all, and for some one to unburden her heart to, Betty began, all about the furniture and everything. Then, seeing

THE POWER OF GOLD

his white face and sad eyes, repented having told him anything, and caught him in her arms, while she scolded herself roundly. What a thing to do, to tell the poor kiddy any more of the family troubles than he already knew!

"Never you mind, dearie; I'm sorry I told you. I should have been shot first."

"No, no, Betty! I would have had to know tomorrow, anyway. Oh, if I was a bigger boy and could help the family some! I love you all so much, and I can't do a thing to help. And poor, dear Mummy, she's the dearest Mother in all the world, and I'd do most anything for her!"

At this point, Shirley and Molly came in, and Betty, bursting into tears again, sent Ronny outside to Dotsy and told the girls the impending calamity. But Molly, as usual, rose to the occasion, saying to Betty:

"Come on, dear, brace up; it's getting dark, so we'll have an early supper and then decide what to do. Here, Shirley, take off your things and fix the fire, while I fill the kettle. Mother will be in presently."

"Oh, I hate to tell her," said Betty. "I had better go and wash all traces of my tears away."

When Margaret arrived shortly after, the girls were as bright as usual, saying nothing about the impending disaster until she had had a good cup of tea, which Betty handed to her, drawing up a rocker close to the stove, saying as she did so: "Here, Mummy, drink this—this wonderful, wonderful cup of tea, warranted to ease care, soothe wounded feelings, and so forth."

"Well," laughed her mother, "it certainly does help a lot."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"You'd better drink it all, then, Mummy," advised Dotsy, who had just come in and was taking her coat off, while she stood by her mother's chair, "'cause," she continued, "I fink they have bad fings to tell you about the furniture."

"Dorothy," sharply rebuked Molly.

"I was telling her so she wouldn't leave any tea," Dorothy defended herself, "'cause you said she's need it all," and her blue eyes opened wider.

As Margaret handed Betty the cup, she spoke quietly: "Tell me, girls. If you can stand it, I can. They are taking the furniture? Is that it?" she asked, looking from one to the other.

After the whole story had been recited, Margaret said:

"It is no more than I expected all along. We must do the best we can. It can't be helped. Make a cup of tea for your father when he comes in. I'm so tired, I'll go in and lie down for awhile." And the girls knew what bitter tears their mother had to shed would be shed there, in her own room, and that when she came out it would be to meet them with her courageous, happy smile.

But the full force of their plight broke upon them the next morning. They had just finished a hasty breakfast of dry bread and a drink of water, when the drays drew up, and in less than an hour the house was cleared of every vestige of furniture. The rooms, save for a few boxes and trunks filled with clothing, were utterly bare. It was in vain Margaret tried to keep back the tears as she swept the kitchen floor and put little Dotsy in a packing box which Cliff had brought in from the woodshed, having filled it with comforters to keep the little girl warm. The family, in

THE POWER OF GOLD

grim desperation, pulled on their coats and prepared for their accustomed hunting for work. Surely they would earn a little! Even little Ronald went down to the corner grocery store to see if he could get a job carrying parcels.

After they had all left and the floors had been swept, Margaret, with a quilt wrapped around her shoulders, sat down on an old bench which had been brought in from the woodshed, while little Dotsy, tired of sitting so long, fell asleep, her head resting on the side of the box, where Margaret had placed an old coat of Ronny's rolled for a pillow. It was, indeed, a cold, desolate room, the bare spot with the black stovepipe hole in the wall bearing a mute evidence of the tragical circumstances.

As the day wore on the wind began to blow. It was snowing hard, had been since early morning, and the wind howled down the chimney and around the side of the house, while flakes of snow banked against the frozen window. From time to time Dorothy wakened and begged for something to eat. Margaret would go to the cupboard and bring forth a tiny piece of bread and give her a drink of water, eating nothing herself, for there was but a small piece of the loaf left from the day before, having done for both supper and breakfast, and they might not have any more. Margaret felt she must make it last till another took its place. And so the long, weary day wore on.

It was nearly dusk when Ronny came in. Besides an apple the store woman had given him, the child had tasted nothing since early morning. Margaret cut him a piece of fast-diminishing loaf, which the lad devoured ravenously. He then went quietly into the front room to his own little box, taking out first the painting

THE POWER OF GOLD

he had been finishing that day so long ago when his father first spoke to Cliff about coming to Canada—the one of the sunset, seen from the dear old sitting-room window; also one of the woods in autumn; another, the lawn and garden; and still another, the old summer house near the apple tree and the holly hedge.

Tears welled in Ronald's eyes as he took them out, one by one, and fondly looked at each. But they would have to go. Didn't Mummy have to part with her things? Even the old chair she used in the nursery to rock them to sleep in when they were weeny little babies. That was worse—far worse! Yes, of course, it was! he would just kiss the pictures and then not look at them again. With trembling lips pressed gently to each, he bade good-bye to his best-loved treasures. Hastily reaching for an old piece of newspaper lying on one of the trunks, he wrapped the pictures quickly and, wiping the tears from his eyes, silently tip-toed out of the front door.

In the kitchen it seemed more dreary, more cheerless and colder as the night advanced. Dorothy woke again, wanting more bread, and Margaret gave her a very tiny piece, put on the child's coat and let her walk around through the rooms for awhile, partly to stretch the cramped little legs and partly to take her mind off more bread, as now she was constantly begging for it. It soon grew dark; the snow fell thick and fast, and it appeared to Margaret that, with the coming of night, the wind howled more dismally than ever down the empty chimney. All at once Dorothy began:

"Mummy, this is Christmas Eve, isn't it?"

"Yes, dear, it is," sighed her mother wearily, the tears rolling down her cheeks.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Oh, dear," wailed the child, "it's Christmas Eve, and I'm hungry, and cold, and tired! Oh, dear, and Santa Claus will never come now, when we haven't any furniture; not even a stove or anything at all. Mummy, turn on the light, do please," and she began to cry pitifully.

Margaret, after hushing and comforting her, rose and hunted for a match with which to light the gas. The other house they had lived in had electric light, but evidently this one was so old it had never been wired for such. In vain she groped around in the dark for a match. Finally, after almost giving up the hunt as hopeless, she found the box with just three matches left. Carefully she lit one and turned on the gas, but it did not light. She tried again, with the same result; then remembered, with a pang, the notice that had come in yesterday's mail—an over-due bill: "If not paid by the twenty-third the gas will be turned off," etc. With a groan she sank down on the box and buried her face in her hands. At this, Dorothy, clinging to her mother, increased her piteous wail, calling: "O, Daddy! Molly! Somebody, come! We're so alone and it's dark!"

As it seemed, almost in response to that heart-rending appeal, they heard footsteps on the front porch, then the door opened and Cliff and Molly, crossing the little sitting-room, entered the little kitchen, exclaiming simultaneously at the darkened room. Margaret explained their plight, and Cliff said, cheerfully: "Well, I have enough to pay the gas bill, or at least part, anyway. I'll go right down. But first, we've got a stove coming up presently. Molly can tell you about it and I'll skip right down to the gas office and get them to turn on the gas."

THE POWER OF GOLD

When he was gone Molly told her mother how, when she was going out in the morning, the postman gave her a package which turned out to be Roger's Christmas gift to her—a pretty little bracelet. "There was just one thing to do," she said with a forced laugh, "visit a pawn shop. I didn't—er—go to the one we usually patronize," she continued humorously, "but the very first one we came to. Cliff came with me, and the man allowed me seven-fifty for it, and right next door was a second-hand furniture store, so we got a stove—an old one, very dirty and rusty, but fairly good."

"Has it pipes?" chimed in Dorothy.

"Oh, yes! Stovepipes and all, and it's coming up at 5.30. They couldn't send it sooner."

"How much was it?" asked Margaret, brightening.

"Only six dollars," replied Molly, and she continued: "When we left the store and were wending our way farther down to see if Cliff could pick up some work, we passed a cheap coffee house—coffee, five cents a cup. We couldn't resist the temptation, for we had only had a piece of bread this morning, and the coffee smelled so good we simply had to have some. When we were coming out, Cliff asked for work. The owner asked if we both wanted work, and upon hearing we were in dire need of such, he put Cliff to scrubbing out the place and me to washing dishes, also resetting the tables. He wanted it done before the noon-hour rush. I'll tell you, we worked with a will. Then we helped in the kitchen, doing all manner of things, and when we finished, he gave us two-fifty and our lunch—a good hot one, too! No wonder we both feel so spry! It was the first time either of us had tasted meat or potatoes for two weeks. Next, we visited a feed store and

THE POWER OF GOLD

bought some nice clean straw, and it's coming up shortly."

"What's the straw for?" asked Dorothy, her eyes widening in surprise.

"To make beds of," answered Molly. "We can't sleep on the bare floor, can we? Oh, yes," resumed Molly, "and we got an old kitchen table, too. It will need a lot of scrubbing, but apart from that it's alright. Cliff said he would get some boxes to use for chairs."

"That's just fine," said Margaret, brightening perceptibly. "You're a dear, good girl, Molly," and she rose from the bench and kissed her daughter affectionately. Then, reaching to the end of the bench where the matches lay, tried again to light the gas, this time successfully. Presently the men arrived with the stove and put it up; also the straw came. So Molly and Cliff, who had returned from the gas office, busied themselves fixing beds, while their mother got a good roaring fire on and set to work scrubbing the old table which came with the stove, singing as she did so. "Oh, the hard parts do not last forever, do they?" she cheerily told Molly. "Now, if we just had something to eat! However, I'll put the cloth on and the dishes out anyway! The girls or your father may bring some food."

"Yes, I hope they do," said Cliff. "I'm sorry, but I haven't a cent left. They made me pay all the gas bill. We had to have light, and I couldn't get away with just paying half, as I had intended. It cleaned me out entirely. Perhaps, as you say, the others will bring something. Hello! Here they are now," he added, smiling. "Speak of the angels—why here's a whole trio of them!"

THE POWER OF GOLD

Into the kitchen walked the two girls and their father, but a more discouraged, tired, hungry three couldn't be imagined; and it was with no answering smile that they took off their wraps and dropped down on the boxes Cliff had provided in lieu of chairs.

"No," they said, in answer to Margaret's query, "we didn't get a thing." And Philip told her how, as a last resort, he had tried the bread line, but he was just one too late, at least. "There was an old man beside me," he explained, "and just one loaf left, so—I let him have it. I knew none of you would want me to do otherwise."

Margaret looked grave, losing much of her former cheeriness as she looked at the three tired white faces before her. "Come close to the stove," she told them. "It's a nice, warm kitchen we have, anyway," and she handed them each a tiny piece of hot, butterless toast, the very last vestige of bread, and a cup of hot water to drink, then sat down by the stove herself, for she was still chilly from the long, cold day.

"What on earth are we going to do for tomorrow?" asked Betty.

"Well, we have straw ticks to sleep on, anyway!" said the still undaunted Cliff, as he cheerfully flung the last pieces of straw in the fire, while Molly brushed a few lingering bits from his coat.

"But don't you realize, Cliff," resumed Betty, a little tremble in her voice, "it's Christmas Eve, and we have nothing to eat?"

"Yes, we have," called Ronald, coming in the back door, his face beaming and his eyes dancing with excitement, as he handed his mother a dollar bill. "There, Mummy, there's a whole dollar. Now we won't starve."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Why, child!" exclaimed his mother in surprise, "did you earn all that?" and she drew the child towards her. Up went the little arms around her neck, while he whispered in her ear: "I sold my pictures, Mummy, but please, please don't tell the others! I can't talk about it." Margaret, looking into his eyes, noticed the unshed tears and the quiver of the sensitive little mouth, and folding him tight in her arms, whispered passionately: "My darling, precious little son," and with her own eyes brimming over with tears, she handed the money to Cliff, who patted Ronald's head, saying: "You're the stuff, old boy!" while the girls cried: "Ronny, you're a hero! You've saved the day."

"You certainly have, little chap," replied his father, as he helped the child off with his coat and pulled him up on his knee, where the lad put his head down on his father's coat with a contented little sigh, a bright smile lighting up his face.

"Now, what of the spending of this fabulous sum?" asked Cliff of his mother, as he reached for his hat and coat, hanging near the door. "What do you suggest?"

"Well," answered his mother, "I think you had better get twenty-five cents worth of that cheap beef and have it minced, so it will last tonight and for our Christmas dinner, too. Then ten cents worth of potatoes would do for both days, fifteen cents for tea, two loaves of bread, a quart of milk, ten cents; a half pound of butter, twenty cents, and five cents worth of brown sugar. There, the dollar will cover it all."

"If I don't get the butter," Cliff said softly to his mother, "it will leave something to buy a few candies for the youngsters' stockings, and perhaps an apple each."

THE POWER OF GOLD

His mother smiled her approval, and Cliff, buttoning up his coat and turning up the collar for greater protection against the raging storm that increased as the night advanced, went to the door, and then, with a little shiver: "Oh, I hate to go out," he said, as he looked towards the little group huddled around the kitchen stove, where they all sat again, happy and hopeful, talking of how good the fire felt and how they would enjoy the dinner that was to be gotten ready as soon as Cliff returned.

"Hurry, hurry, Cliff!" cried Betty. "I can hardly wait. I could gobble up that steak raw, though that may be a 'raw' way of putting it; but it's a fact, I could!"

"Alright," answered Cliff, with a stride towards the door again, his thin summer coat, for such was all he possessed, held closely around him, "I guess we're all pretty hungry, and I wouldn't like Betty to turn cannibal."

"Mind, everybody, it's Christmas Eve and we're happy, even if we are somewhat hungry," said Shirley. "Lots of people are far worse off!"

"I should say they are!" said Ronald, raising his head from his father's shoulder. "If you had seen what I saw coming home tonight! There was a young man, as old as Cliff, I guess, and he was drunk—awful drunk. He could hardly walk at all. His mother had to help him along. She just had an old shawl around her, and she was crying, too, 'cause he was pulling away from her. His mother kept saying: 'Come, Tom, come home, do; it's Christmas Eve.' Then she cried harder than ever. I ran; I didn't like to hear her and I thought how terrible it would be if it was Cliff." At this point Ronald burst out crying and,

THE POWER OF GOLD

running to Cliff, threw his arms around him sobbing. Cliff sat down and took the boy in his arms. "Don't cry, little pal," he begged, as he held the little fellow to him, patting the brown head: "I won't get drunk, you needn't fear, and we'll have lots of good times together yet, don't forget it. You and I are going fishing next summer, see if we don't," and he gave the little fellow into his mother's arms, saying: "There, Mumsie, comfort him while I run before the stores are all closed."

"Yes, you'd better," called little Dorothy from her corner behind the stove, where she was, as usual, putting her doll to bed, "and if you see Santa Claus, tell him please not to disappoint us, even if he doesn't bring us much, if he'll only come."

"Alright, honey, I'll tell tell him," and away he went, thankful beyond words that their needs would be relieved and that the children would not be disappointed.

While Cliff was gone, their father, much to Dorothy's delight, nailed a board in lieu of a mantelpiece next to the kitchen chimney, and Betty cut some brown paper, nicked the edges to make it look fancy and covered the board with it. Ronald said it looked just like a mantle, and if he had some paints he could paint a fireplace on it, but Dorothy was pleased with it as it was, and only hoped Santa would see it.

"If he only brings me one thing, even," she kept repeating, as she and Ronald brought their stockings to hang on the improvised mantel and then stood off to admire the effect.

"Never you fear, children, he'll come. Cliff will tell him," Margaret assured them.

It did not take Cliff long to make the necessary purchases and

THE POWER OF GOLD

return home. Margaret and the girls took the parcels from him and hastily prepared the dinner, which was ravenously partaken of by the entire family. After the dishes were washed and put away, Margaret said to the children: "Now, my dears, it's bedtime. Betty, you go and help them undress; it's cold in there—get them in bed quickly."

When Betty came out to the kitchen again, after tucking the children, cozy and warm, in their little beds of straw, Molly was just returning from the front door, her face aglow and carrying in her arms a large box, which had just arrived from the express office. The family gathered around the table while their father cut the cords and wrappings. Removing the cover, there lay, first of all, on top, a note which ran:

"To our dear ones in Canada: These are a few gifts which we send with our best love and good wishes, hoping they will add to your Christmas joy.—Your loving Sisters and Aunt."

If only the senders could have had the remotest idea of how joyfully those gifts were received and the use they were turned to they would, indeed, have felt amply repaid for the sending.

As article after article was taken from the box and laid on the table the rejoicing increased. First was a beautiful silk sweater for Margaret and one for each of the girls; candy for the children, and toys, a lovely box of paints for Ronald, a prettily dressed doll for Dorothy. Then came an English plum pudding, a Christmas cake and at last a box of English holly. At once, Margaret, practical as always, cried: "Cliff, go out and dispose of these sweaters. We'll keep the cake and pudding for our Christmas dinner, with plenty to do for New Year's as well. Why, we will

THE POWER OF GOLD

have a splendid Christmas dinner, for, if you can sell the sweaters, Cliff, you can buy some more meat and vegetables."

"That's right," he answered enthusiastically, "I'll do it. Here, Molly, wrap 'em up."

"Wasn't that most thoughtful of them?" went on Margaret. "It has just saved the day for us!"

"Indeed it has," answered Molly. "We'll have a splendid Christmas after all."

When Cliff returned home in about two hours' time, he gave his mother ten dollars and a half, the proceeds of the sweaters, or part of it, for he carried in his arms a small turkey.

"Cliff, what on earth did you buy a turkey for?" exclaimed his mother in surprise.

"To eat, Mumsie, to eat," he responded with a grin. "Oh, I know you'll say that money would have kept us for days. I know it, but it only cost a dollar. The little butcher shop down by the tram car was just closing and I went in to get some more steak or stew, and I noticed all these small turkeys on a counter marked a dollar each, and, by jove, I thought I'd surprise you all and cart one home. It is Christmas, and, after all, we have the ten-fifty, which will go far with your good management, Mother."

"Oh, I'm glad you did buy a turkey!" cried Molly. "I feel as happy as can be tonight. I just know things will be better in the new year, and won't the children be delighted when they see a real Christmas dinner—plum pudding and all?"

"I'll say they will!" said Betty. "And a Christmas cake, too."

"Yes, that's so," answered Margaret, though still somewhat

THE POWER OF GOLD

dubious over the turkey. "As Cliff says, it's Christmas, and the children will be so pleased."

"Indeed, they will," answered her husband. "Now, let's fill the stockings."

CHAPTER XVI.

With the coming of the New Year the Wainwright's hopes seemed about to be fulfilled. Christmas had been wonderful; everyone happy, bright and cheerful; the children overjoyed at sight of their stockings bulging out with good things; the dinner served on the kitchen table, the kitchen clean and bright, with a good fire in the now shining stove; the plum pudding, cake and turkey—all combined to make a wonderfully happy, glad day, which they, one and all, enjoyed to the utmost.

The week between Christmas and New Year's had been a change for the better, too, Philip having work at the woodyard for five days and Cliff busy most of the time at the docks. Then, with the money from the sweaters, Margaret had bought half a dozen old cane chairs and two rockers, all of which were badly in need of repair, but which Cliff and his father mended to the best of their ability. Their skill in such matters was not expert; still, Margaret pronounced it a "first-class job."

One clear, cold night, about the middle of January, Betty and Molly, who had been out all day, still diligently searching for employment, rushed in breathlessly to the kitchen.

"Mother, we both have positions!" they cried. "Think of it, Mumsie, both of us!" and in her delight, Betty caught her mother in her arms and began a wild dance.

"Why, Betty," exclaimed Margaret, "wait a minute—wait, dear—let me get my breath. Tell me all about it. Here is Shirley coming in, let her hear, too. Come on, Shirley, quick,

THE POWER OF GOLD

and hear the wonderful news," and her mother sat down on one of the kitchen chairs to listen.

"We have positions at last!" And Betty grabbed Shirley, as she came in, and gave her a squeeze, too. "Oh, I'm so excited! And, just fancy, it's in that large department store where I went last summer by mistake. You know, girls, I told you about him that day last August in the garden? You remember, I went up to the manager's office, Mr. Milton Harwood. He was so nice to me, only it was a male clerk they wanted. I had read the advertisement wrong."

"Oh, I remember," said Shirley. "He said he was so sorry, and took your address, didn't he?"

"Yes, that's the one. Well, I hadn't heard at all, and Molly coaxed me to go in and see him again, and what do you think—he had lost my address, and there was a vacancy at the glove counter. Forty dollars per month to begin with. He said he was very pleased I came in. Oh, he is lovely—tall and handsome! Only I don't have anything to do with him, worse luck! I'm under another man, a Mr. Gills, who looks after all the clerks—sort of head clerk. He's horrid. I'd like to give him a biff in the eye. And, by the way, one of his eyes is crossed, too. And say, the beggar patted me on the back after showing me my counter, and, if you please, called me kiddo, and chucked me under the chin. If he does that again I'll bite him. As it was, I gave him a look cold enough to freeze and haughty enough to squelch. I'm to begin tomorrow morning. Gee, I can hardly wait! Now you tell your news, Molly."

"Mine," began Molly, "is where I supplied for one of the

THE POWER OF GOLD

girls last summer. You remember Bessie Roy, a friend of Mildred Ross, in a stock broker's office? He has wonderful offices and keeps, I guess, a dozen employees, both men and girls. They have three stenographers, besides his own private secretary—she gets two hundred a month, one of the girls told me, but she's a woman about thirty-five, I should imagine; a homely person, but very capable, I believe. I am just a junior and as such will only get sixty dollars."

"Sixty dollars?" her mother repeated, astonished. "Why, it sounds like a fortune!"

Shirley laughed and then asked: "What's the broker like, Molly? Handsome, like Betty's employer?"

"No, plain; very plain and old. I should judge about forty. Big man, but with the smallest eyes I have ever seen. They're almost black. Gives him such a queer expression. I should worry what he looks like, though; he is a most successful man, has a huge business, and that is what counts. There is opportunity for advancement there."

"That's it," agreed Betty, with a nod; "his looks do not matter. If he was as ugly as Satan, himself, and had two big horns, makes no difference, so long as you could horn in on the money."

"What is his name?" inquired Shereley.

"Oliver Blake," answered Molly.

"His name is better than he is," commented Betty.

"Oh, now I know what he puts me in mind of," she resumed, her eyes sparkling, "an elephant. Blake looks just like an elephant—little beady, cruel-looking eyes, and if he stepped on you—good night! And, believe me, he would have no qualms of

THE POWER OF GOLD

conscience in stepping on anything or anyone to gain his own ends."

"Why, did you see him?" asked Shirley, turning to Betty.

"Yes, we both went in, but old Elephant only glanced at me once. All his attention was given to Molly. He looked her up and down as though she was a prize horse. I would have given him the horse laugh had it been me, but our well-behaved sister gave him a most engaging smile, hence, she was engaged."

It seemed to Margaret almost incredulous the fortunate turn their affairs had taken, especially when the first month was up and the three girls brought home their cheques, amounting to one hundred and thirty dollars. She hoarded it all away carefully, only keeping out sufficient for their lunches and carfare, not daring to spend a cent more than was necessary, and as Cliff and his father had fairly steady employment, Margaret was able to run the little home without the girls' money. So it was not till the second month had come and gone with another hundred and thirty dollars to add to the first, or thereabouts, that she began replenishing the rooms. A few cheap iron beds, bought from a second-hand dealer, with new mattresses for each and a few comfortable chairs, that was all. Yet even that much was spent almost reluctantly, as the memory of those lean weeks was yet a vivid picture before her. Counting what Cliff and his father made, the family income aggregated over two hundred dollars a month. The family agreed that their mother should have charge of all the funds, only retaining what each one required for lunches and such. It was likewise decided to pay back the money borrowed from the relatives in England; for, as Margaret explained, her

THE POWER OF GOLD

sisters were not at all in affluent circumstances, and it was only right that the sum borrowed should be returned at once. The trinkets and jewelry that had been pawned were also redeemed—all but the bracelet Roger had sent Molly at Christmas. The man had moved away, and hunt as she might, no trace of him could be found, which caused poor Molly great regret.

The girls enjoyed their work very much. Shirley probably had the easiest position, as it was rather a new establishment, not so well known as some of the other stores, and in one of the cheaper business districts. Mr. and Mrs. Brown, who ran the place, were very good to her. Margaret was glad of this, as Shirley was not so strong as her sisters, and while the wages were less than Molly's and Betty's, the work was very light, mainly sorting and marking the different sizes of garments.

Not so with Betty, who found serving at a glove counter very tiresome, indeed. Nevertheless, so well did she acquit herself that before the third month was up she was promoted to head salesgirl, the one who formerly held the position having married. Betty's wages were also increased from forty to forty-five dollars per month.

All would have gone well, but for Mr. Gills. Betty disliked him intensely and, as he still persisted in his unwelcome attentions, her dislike changed to undisguised aversion. Mr. Gills was a married man, about fifty. Betty kept him in his place fairly well, though sometimes he overstepped the mark. At such times she would come home at night, her eyes blazing with fury, and would recite to her sisters the cause of annoyance, threatening what she would do some day if he didn't behave, which led one night, as

THE POWER OF GOLD

they undressed for bed, to the suggestion from Molly to lay a complaint before Mr. Harwood.

"No," said Betty, as, jumping into bed, she lay relaxed while Molly was brushing her hair, "we never have any chance to talk to Mr. Harwood. Must take our orders from old Gills. We're not supposed to bother Mr. Harwood about anything, and if I broke the rule I'd likely get fired. Never fear, I'll fight my own battles."

"Do be careful," advised Molly. "Just now when we are looking forward to an improvement in our home affairs, it would put a damper on things in general if you lost your position."

"Don't fear, honey bunch," assured Betty, "I won't get myself 'let out.' By the way, Dorothy, our little newsbearer, tells me that she and Mother go out house-hunting nearly every day, and that Mother is thinking of renting a white cottage with a veranda all around. Dotsy was quite elated with the prospect. Do you know anything about it, Moll?"

"Not very much, except that it is in a nice quiet neighborhood, but an old house that needs redecorating very badly. The rent is cheap. Mother spoke to me concerning it tonight, before you girls came in. She isn't saying anything till after talking to the agent tomorrow. She thought Dad and Cliff could paint and paper the rooms, and if they do, I think we can rent it for about forty-five dollars a month."

"Good," said Shirley, climbing into bed beside Betty. "Won't it be great to get out of this hole, for that is all it is. These old places should be torn down. No doubt the man who owns this is wealthy, and we poor souls pay our few dollars to add to

THE POWER OF GOLD

his wealth. But I suppose, after all, he is the poor soul to be obtaining wealth through any such methods."

"By the way, how is your position panning out, Molly?" asked Betty.

"Fine! Mr. Blake has me take all his dictation when Miss Smith is out. I'm becoming acquainted with his ways now. He is really the easiest man to please I ever met. You know, I don't type very fast, and sometimes get flustered a bit; but he always smiles and says: 'Take your time, child, don't hurry'."

"Hm," scoffed Betty, "child, eh? I bet he wouldn't call you child if you were as homely as Miss Smith is."

"Nonsense," denied Molly.

"And," continued Betty, "what about letting those other seniors take his dictation? You're the only junior in the bunch, yet he chooses you. I don't like that fellow, with his little beady eyes and tight, rabbit mouth; he looks hard as nails to me."

"That's just where you are mistaken, Betty," quickly rebuked Molly. "Mr. Blake is very generous and is very much interested in Dad. Asked me what kind of a position Dad was looking for. Said he would be only too pleased to take him on in the bond department, if Dad wished to come."

"He did, eh?" asked Shirley brightly. "Why, that's grand. Did you tell Dad?"

"No, not yet. I wanted to talk to Mother first. Dad must have new clothes you know; and, then, he might not be able to do at all; it will be all new work for him. However, I'm going to get into bed and go to sleep. We'll talk it over tomorrow," and Molly slipped into the single bed in the corner and turned off the gas jet.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Good-night," said Betty, "but I don't like your Mr. Blake. He's a sly old bird. You'll see yet; he has something up his sleeve."

"Birds haven't any sleeves," remarked Molly, with mock sweetness. "They use their bills."

"Ah, I predict, then, you'll have to foot the bill some day, my dear. He will make you pay for all his kindness, and with interest, too, or I'm greatly mistaken. He reminds me more and more of a big elephant, just ready to land his two feet on some helpless lamb; but if he tries any such dodge on this family he sure will find he has put his foot in it."

CHAPTER XVII.

Margaret took the white cottage that Dorothy had told the girls about, bought wallpaper and paint, and did most of the walls herself, notwithstanding the protestations of both husband and son. The ceilings she left to be done by Cliff and his father in the evenings, taking the tram straight there from work, after having a cup of coffee and sandwiches, eaten at a nearby restaurant. They worked each night till it was completed and ready to move into, which they did in the early spring, Margaret getting the garden planted with the family's assistance.

Dorothy was in her element, helping her mother. It was her keen delight after the family went to work and Ronald to school for she and her mother to start in packing, or planning for the move to the bungalow; or, as she called it, "the white bundle low." Another of her favorite pastimes was to go shopping with her mother to help select the furnishings for the new home. Margaret had purchased pretty curtains for the windows, comfortable furniture for the rooms, and it was a most attractive, though simple cottage. The three girls entered their new home for the first time one wet evening in April when they came home from work. The trees along the boulevards were budding, the new green leaves sparkling in the soft spring rain; on each side of the street stood small, but nicely kept homes, with neatly clipped lawns and hedges.

"What a vast difference to the neighborhood we've lived in all winter!" Molly remarked, as they walked along.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Yes," agreed Shirley, "it certainly is, and now we can have all our old friends in again, can't we, girls?"

"You've said it," answered Betty, "and Doctor Ellis, too; eh, Shirley?" A shadow passed over Shirley's face. "I don't know about that, Betty. I met him a few days ago and was going to stop to tell him our new address; he had asked me so many times where we lived, and now that I was in a position to give him the address, he didn't stop to talk at all. Just raised his hat and passed on."

"The old piker!" cried Betty. "Never mind, honey, you'll soon meet lots of men; have your choice, too. So, you see, it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. He might get wind of it at that, and come back; but that's just blowing bubbles in the air, isn't it?"

"Never mind, girls," comforted Molly, "now that we have a decent house again we'll invite all the old crowd in; ask Dr. Ellis, too. You see, he will come. We'll give him a chance to refuse, anyway. Roger says he is a very fine fellow, and I know he wonders why we never have him up as we used to."

"Oh, by the way, how is Roger?" asked Betty.

"Fine. He tells me so many things about that Chinaman of his. Last week the fellow asked Roger why he didn't buy a wife, and when Roger told him perhaps some day he would come back here to Montreal for one, Chung said: 'Whata malle, you go to Montreal, catch him wife? Heap plenty girl here, catch him cheap.' He likes Roger; puts our piece on the gramophone, he knows it's a favorite of Roger's, and says: 'All samee, bossy man heap likee piece, makes bossy man whistle, sing, dance, Chung savee'."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Isn't he funny?" laughed Shereley.

"That reminds me," Betty said. "Dorothy told me this morning that Mother had a surprise. She wouldn't tell me what, but said you could dance to it, so I guess it's a gramophone."

"If it is, I'll buy that record," said Molly. "Roger often asks if I play it. I couldn't tell him the gramophone had been taken from us, and the records, too; but all those trials are past now and Mother is right, girls, it's the hardships one goes through that fits one to enjoy happiness to the full, when it comes. Well, here we are at our new home. Mother said it was two blocks from the car, but they are certainly long blocks. Look, there is Dorothy at the window watching for us. See her eyes, how bright and excited they are? The darling! I'll bet she has enjoyed helping Mother get things in shape."

Dorothy and her mother both opened the door for the girls, who walked in with smiling faces. "Oh, you dears," they cried, as they kissed both their mother and Dorothy.

"Welcome to our new home, girls," said Margaret, while Dorothy, jumping up and down, cried: "Come on, girls, and see everything," and forthwith led the way to a room at the right of the hall, which proved to be the girls' bedroom. It contained a large brass bed for Shirley and Betty, and a single one for Molly. Everything was clean and dainty. Frilly white curtains adorned the windows, a very nice dresser and a rocker at the south window. It all looked so pretty and home-like.

The girls exclaimed with delight over everything. Across the hall was a good sized living-room, comfortably furnished, where a fire burned brightly; sliding doors to an equally pretty dining-

THE POWER OF GOLD

room, opening in turn to a well-lighted kitchen. The windows, with snowy-white sash curtains, had a red geranium blooming in each. Beside this was a side hall, off which opened two bedrooms and bath. Altogether a very comfortable little home.

The girls were delighted, Margaret feeling amply repaid by the words of praise repeatedly given, as they went from room to room, with Dorothy skipping along behind, showing them this, pointing out that; then last, but not least, the gramophone. Margaret had bought it at a comparatively low price at a house sale. After inspecting all the nice things, the girls retraced their steps to their pretty new bedroom and removed their hats, then returned to the living-room.

Betty drew an easy chair up to the fire for her mother, saying: "Come, you best of mothers, sit here till your daughters serve the dinner. I know it's a good one; smells like roast chicken. I saw lemon pies on the kitchen table, too."

"Oh, well," excused her mother, "I thought we could have an extra good dinner the first night, by way of celebration. Sit down, girls, it's all ready, but we have to wait for your father and Cliff."

"That reminds me," began Molly, sitting down opposite her mother, "Dad was down to the office today. I was so proud of him! He looked so spic and span in his new suit. Mr. Blake said, after Dad left: 'An aristocratic father you have, Miss Molly.'"

"Miss Molly, indeed!" exclaimed Betty, looking up from some records she found in the gramophone. "Since when has his highness been addressing you thusly?"

"Don't be silly," chided Molly. "I'm the youngest in the office, that's all."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Is that all?" and Betty picked up another record, her mother asking:

"What did he say to your father?"

"He offered him a hundred a month, and moreover, told me confidentially that he would tip Dad off what to buy on the stock market. Mr. Blake has made a fortune himself. He is twice a millionaire, and he said there was no reason why Dad shouldn't make money fast."

"Yes," angrily spoke Betty, this time putting the records down with a bang, her eyes blazing, "I'll bet my hat he'll get all Dad makes and all he has ever paid you, too. Let him go to blazes with his advice; we can manage our own show! All the trouble we've ever had was through speculations. We are on our feet once more and we don't want to lose out again. Isn't that right, Mother?"

"It is, dear. We are getting along nicely. Really, I would much rather not have your father invest one cent in anything."

"My sentiments, too," spoke Shirley. "What are we earning now, with Dad's hundred, makes three hundred a month."

"I'm satisfied," said her mother, "with things as they are. Our rent's only forty-five and we can save nearly two hundred dollars."

"Of course, we can," spoke Betty emphatically, "so let Beady Eyes stay out of our affairs. He would bankrupt us, that's what he would do," warned Betty.

"Never fear," assured her mother, "I'll bank all the money. There will be no chance for him to get it."

But despite Margaret's care and caution, Philip listened readily to Mr. Blake's suggestion, for was not Blake a successful financier

THE POWER OF GOLD

himself? How could his advice go amiss? Thus reasoned Philip to the seeming logical conclusion that, with Blake's assistance, which assistance the broker was only too willing to give, might he not profit by these suggestions?

Margaret was keenly alert to what was happening, and bitterly disappointed when, month after month, her husband brought no cheque home, but instead, had bought on the open market whatever Mr. Blake advised. In vain did she remonstrate, endeavored to prevail on him to desist from such speculations, but Philip was adamant. This, he said, was a golden opportunity; it would be the height of folly not to take advantage of it.

Mr. Blake now had Molly as his private secretary, increased her salary first to seventy-five, then in two months more she received another raise, and from that to a hundred. Mr. Blake was also instrumental in securing for Cliff a very good position in a large insurance company, where he began at one hundred and fifty dollars a month. Of course, Cliff alone could never have obtained such a post. Nevertheless, "pull," as usual, won out, and Cliff was installed at what seemed to him a magnificent salary.

Though all this increased their income, Margaret used the utmost economy in her housekeeping, tending her garden as usual with the assistance of Ronald, and banking all the surplus money that passed through her hands; but her husband's earnings she never even saw. That was turned over and over in the stock market.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The girls and Cliff resumed their former friendships, especially the Rosses. Mildred had proven herself a very true friend, and Cliff seemed prone to single her out from all the other girls, much to his mother's satisfaction, for Margaret appreciated the fine qualities in the girl's character. Jack Ross, too, now almost finished with his law course, was a fine, clean, high-principled chap, whom Cliff found most companionable.

On the evening of Shirley's twentieth birthday, the eighteenth of July, they gave one of their old-time gatherings. Of course, the Rosses headed the list, then the girls in the bank where Molly was employed the first year they were in Canada; also Bessie Roy, who was in the same office with her now, a gentle quiet girl whom Molly had become quite friendly with; a number of young men friends of Cliff's, and several of Shirley's old school friends. Molly had invited Doctor Ellis, too, though his coming seemed quite uncertain, as she explained to Shirley, who was standing beside her at the telephone when Molly phoned him, anxiously waiting the result of the conversation. The Doctor had spoken very friendly, but doubted his ability to accept the invitation; would try, but really could not promise. Shirley was plainly disappointed. However, it couldn't be helped, and Molly comforted her by saying that there was, of course, a possibility of his coming. Molly also suggested inviting Mr. Blake, but to this Betty strenuously objected. Both girls followed the dejected looking Shirley out to the kitchen, where Betty proceeded to hunt for the ironing

THE POWER OF GOLD

cord to press out a dainty little blue gown for the event. After much searching, she found it among some toys in the corner, where Dotsy had it converted into a doll's swing. Adjusting the cord and placing the dress on the board, she turned to Molly:

"What were we speaking of when I began looking for the lost cord? Oh, I remember now—about asking old man Blake to our party. Well, I say no! Talk about a lost cord; he would be a discord. You are associated with that man too closely to get a clear perspective of him. That is why we see him in such a totally different light, and if you care to be friends with him, alright, but count the rest of us out; we don't want him; he wouldn't fit in; besides, it would spoil the evening for Shirley."

Shirley, on her way to her room, shook her head as she passed, saying: "Molly, do as you like, old dear; you couldn't spoil my evening. It will take more than Oliver Blake to spoil things for me if only Doctor Ellis comes; and if the Doctor doesn't come, the party will be spoilt for me, anyway."

"Don't say that, dearie," begged Molly; "for to tell the truth, judging from the way he spoke, I don't believe he intends to come. He said it was his night on duty and didn't think he could get off."

"Oh, he can," declared Shirley. "He often used to change with one of the other house doctors on the nights we went sleighing; don't you remember?"

"Yes, I do; but don't let it spoil your evening, for I'm afraid he won't come, dear; so just brave up, like a good girl, and make up your mind to have a good time without him. You will have a nice birthday despite the fact of him not being here."

"Very well, I'll try, Molly; and you go on and invite Mr. Blake if you want to."

THE POWER OF GOLD

Shirley was bright and gay on the night of the party, a happy expectancy lighting up her sweet, pretty face; for, as she told herself, he might change his mind and come after all.

Each time the doorbell rang her spirits soared—then sank, as some girl friend or one of the fellows from Cliff's office entered the room, but no Doctor Ellis. No word from him, either. One and all of those invited came—all but the one whose presence alone would have made the "ball so fine."

When the evening was in full swing, Shirley slipped out on the veranda, unobserved. The night was perfect, warm and clear, the air scented with roses. In the houses opposite and all down the street windows stood open, showing well-lighted rooms, while strains of music floated through the air. Shirley leaned against the veranda post. How foolish, she thought, was this feeling of loneliness and disappointment when everything was so lovely. It was nice to have all the old crowd in; and what a pretty quaint little home they had, too—so much to make her happy! She must not let the fact of Doctor Ellis not coming spoil her birthday—they had all worked hard to give her this party; no sense in feeling down-hearted just because one in particular didn't care about wishing her a happy birthday. Yet, even as she so soliloquized, tears filled her eyes, which, if allowed, would have fallen freely. Try as she might, she was unable to shake off the depression. But this would never do! Couldn't stay out here all evening—they would miss her, sure to; but she could not go in. Despite all efforts, the tears began to drop and, putting her arms up against the veranda post, Shirley laid her head down and wept. Then suddenly the gate clicked. She raised her head

THE POWER OF GOLD

hastily, dabbing her handkerchief to her eyes. Why—oh, surely—yes, it was Doctor Ellis striding quickly up the walk.

"Well, well," he smiled, "the young hostess out all alone on the porch! Why, how is this?"

"Oh, I was hot," stammered Shirley, blushing furiously as they shook hands.

"You look it, Shirley; almost as warm as these," and he handed her a box.

Shirley took it from his outstretched hands, her own shaking. Undoing the wrapper, she opened the box wherein lay a beautiful bunch of red roses, then exclaimed: "Oh, aren't they lovely! I'm so glad, Doctor Ellis—that is—you're so kind to remember me," she murmured.

"I've never forgotten you, little Shirley," he murmured, as he bent towards her, his eyes sparkling, "but I have wondered sometimes—" At this most inopportune time several of the young folk strolled out on the verandah and Shirley's little tete-a-tete came to an abrupt end. Nevertheless, it was a very happy-faced girl who walked into the kitchen to put the roses in water.

Molly, making sandwiches at the kitchen table, looked up in surprise. "Shirley, where did you get those?"

"From him—Doctor Ellis. He came—oh, I'm so happy! It will be a wonderful birthday after all. I'm so happy, and, oh, Moll, I did feel so badly, so disappointed before he came; I couldn't help it; but now!" and the radiant-faced Shirley picked up the bowl of roses and carried them into the living-room.

Molly smiled knowingly. Now she could sympathize with her

THE POWER OF GOLD

little sister. How she had hoped and watched for Roger, and what wonderful times they had been. Dear Roger; it seemed so long since he had been with her. How lonely without him! Oh, well, mustn't complain; the time would soon pass now, then she would go back with him. Their waiting would be over then. He would be down at Christmas; in a little over five months. Must be patient, that's all. She had his letters, anyway, wonderful letters they were, too.

As these thoughts ran through her mind, from the living-room came the strains of "their piece," "The West, a Nest and You," and in a fair ecstasy of happy memories, Molly closed her eyes. She could feel Roger's arms around her once more; see his dear face smiling down into hers; then: "Well, well, Miss Molly, I wondered where you were." And Molly looked up to meet the gaze of Oliver Blake.

"Shirley told me you were here making sandwiches; said I might come and help you. Kind of her, wasn't it?" and he looked quizzically at Molly's flushed face.

"Yes, very," answered Molly, wondering if he sensed the disturbing of pleasant reveries. "Here," she said, recovering herself and smiling in a friendly manner, "take these in, please," passing him a dish of bon-bons.

"Hm, not trying to get rid of me, are you, Miss Molly?" Mr. Blake said.

"No, of course not," laughed Molly. "You may come out again, if you wish, and we'll finish making these sandwiches. At least, I will. You may watch me and tell me how the stock market has gone today. That's more in your line, isn't it?"

THE POWER OF GOLD

As he went towards the hall with the bon-bons, Betty entered the kitchen from the dining-room.

"What was that fellow doing out here?" she inquired, seating herself at the table and proceeding to cut the crusts off the neat pile of sandwiches.

"Sh, Betty, he'll hear you."

"Small odds if he does. Let him keep out of here. I very nearly hate that man, with his cunning smirk."

"Betty, please don't! Think of all he has done for us. He is most generous and kind."

"Bah! Kind? He is not doing it all for nothing, believe me! He is too sly for you, Molly, that's all."

"Alright, but don't let's talk about him, Betty. Tell me, is Shirley having a good time?"

"I'll say she is!" laughed Betty, her good humor returning. "She's walking on air, and that's not hot air. Can't see anyone but Doctor Ellis, and it strikes me he is affected with the same obliviousness."

"Isn't that splendid, Betty! Now that she has a nice home to entertain him in affairs may go well with our little Shirley."

"Wouldn't wonder if they did, Molly; and it surely is a comfort to be able to live nicely again."

"Yes," answered Molly, "we can appreciate both home and friends now to a much greater extent, having been deprived so long. I am glad for Shirley. Poor child, her eyes were like stars as she showed me those roses. How about you, Betty? You are nearly twenty-two now, and I don't think you have ever had even a boy friend."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"I'm not that kind, that's all, old dear," and Betty leaned back in her chair, nibbling a sandwich as Molly cut and spread the last one. "I have a better time with all the boys and girls together. There's only one man in the world who could make any impression on my thoughts, anyway, and that's Mr. Harwood. Say, the first glance at him my head swam. I've been light-headed ever since; light-headed and heavy-hearted. Awful combination, isn't it, Molly? I could never meet him socially. I'm just one of his two hundred employees. What chance have I to be noticed by him! No, no; I'm just going to forget that he exists, because he doesn't remember that I exist; I'm certain of that." She picked up another sandwich and resumed: "We happened to meet at the door going out to lunch the other day; he didn't even see me—just a furtive glance, and passed on. Didn't recognize me as one of his clerks, even. So, you see," with a stifled little sigh, "I'm through with men before I'm even beginning. But you know me, Molly; guess I'm what they call a one-man girl."

"What would you have done, Betty, supposing he had asked you to lunch?"

"Oh, I would very likely have just stood staring at him with my mouth open, and perhaps would not have gone a step with him, and that would have been taking a step in the wrong direction."

"Well, we have the sandwiches all finished. Hand me that plate, Betty, please; they are all ready to serve, so I'll run in to Dorothy's room and let Mother come out. Poor Dorothy; too bad her tooth is aching tonight."

"Let me go, Molly; I'll stay with her till she goes to sleep."

THE POWER OF GOLD

No use me going back to the living room. They're dancing, and there aren't enough boys as it is; so I'd only be a wallflower. You had better go and see how Mr. Blake is getting on. It's a wonder he hasn't come out here again, isn't it, Molly?"

"I guess he knew you didn't want him, Betty. Perhaps it would be well for me to go into the living-room now and see how our guests are faring, at all events. Dear knows what Shirley will be doing."

"She will be looking after one guest, I'll wager!" And Betty slipped out to the side hall, en route to Dorothy's room to relieve her mother.

Molly untied her kitchen apron and went in search of Mr. Blake. It wouldn't do to offend him after all his kindness to her father and herself. She found him standing out on the veranda smoking.

"Here you are, Molly," he said, throwing away his half-smoked cigar, "I have been waiting for you."

"Why didn't you come back to help me with the sandwiches?" asked Molly, as she stood beside him.

"Oh, I knew that young sister of yours didn't want me. Doesn't like me, that young lady, does she?" and without waiting for a reply, went on: "Just you wait till she sees what I'm going to do for this family. Perhaps she will think differently. Money talks, I know." Then, striding to the end of the veranda, sat down on one of the chairs and, as an afterthought, he pushed a chair forward for Molly.

Molly, wondering at this breach of etiquette, sat down, while Mr. Blake, after a slight pause, resumed: "Your father, with my

THE POWER OF GOLD

help, will be able to buy a car soon. Then, I guess she'll not give me those haughty looks."

"Don't mind Betty," said Molly, as she laid her hand lightly on his arm. "Betty is a good sort at heart, just a little—what shall I say—well, as my Aunt Alice would put it, 'highty-tighty'."

CHAPTER XIX.

Oliver Blake's assertion that through his assistance on the stock market Mr. Wainwright would be in a sufficiently strong financial condition to allow for the purchase of a car came true. The family was delighted! What pleasurable pastimes they now anticipated. Margaret was glad, also, but a little dubious. "Would it not have been wiser," she asked her husband, "to have waited awhile longer?" But Philip scoffed at the suggestion. "No, no, Margaret," he contended, "buy a motor, by all means. Let the youngsters have a good time. No need to hoard every cent now, not with our bank account steadily increasing." And Margaret, against her better judgment, acquiesced.

"What a change," thought Philip, "this August compared with last." The previous summer had been so full of hardships, discouragements, disheartening circumstances! This August the complete opposite. The present decidedly prosperous; the future bright and rosy. And why not, with such complete assurance of continued success evidenced in the fact that one so capable, so efficient in business, was directing his speculations. It was Oliver Blake who told him when to buy, what to buy, when to hold and when to sell. Philip could never have done it alone.

Small wonder Molly was anxious to please Oliver, fearful lest Betty offend him. Many the time she pleaded with her haughty young sister, saying: "Betty, please be nice to Oliver tonight, he is coming to dinner." Or again it might be, "He is calling for me; we are going driving," for Oliver was now a regular visitor at the

THE POWER OF GOLD

"White Bungalow." At such times Betty would endeavor to curb her dislike, saying to Shirley:

"I suppose I've got to be nice to that man, for Molly's sake, but I do wish she wouldn't go out so much with him—an engaged girl, too."

But Shirley was oblivious to where Molly went or with whom. Her own evenings were spent largely with Doctor Ellis, in his little coupe; evenings so delightful, so altogether engrossing that she failed to get the same viewpoint of Molly's actions.

On these hot summer evenings, Molly and Oliver out in the roadster, Shirley and the Doctor also out, Betty would roam through the house or sit on the veranda with Dorothy, listening to her amusing chatter. Betty often urged her father and mother to go to the band concert or down to the park; she would look after the kiddies. Since all the others were out sky-larking, they might as well also. Even Cliff had gone out as usual with Mildred Ross in the Wainwright's new car. Cliff tried to prevail on his father to learn to drive, but it did not appeal to Philip, nor had it any attraction for Margaret.

If Betty felt lonely these evenings, she complained to no one, though sometimes she would think, "Wish I had someone to play around with—anyone, just to get out, to be going somewhere like Molly and Shirley." Then the memory of a pair of dark grey eyes, a sleek black head bent over his desk, would come up before her and she knew "just anyone" wouldn't do. But what was the sense of thinking of him? In fact, the likelihood of Betty ever remaining in Mr. Harwood's employ seemed to be very uncertain, for Mr. Gills was making himself more objectionable

THE POWER OF GOLD

than ever, and Betty's temper was ready to snap. Molly often warned her not to show her feelings so plainly, but Betty was incorrigible.

"Why in blazes doesn't he leave me alone?" Betty would say. "What business has he mauling me every chance he gets, taking hold of my arm, letting his hand rest on my shoulder until I shake it off and tell him to mind his own business? The silly old bat even tried to kiss me the other day in the stock-room. If he does it again I'll fix him!"

"Betty, Betty, do be careful! You'll lose your position," pleaded Molly.

It was a hot day—the end of August—when the inevitable happened, which sent Betty tearing home about six o'clock, breathless and weeping. Opening the front door, she hurried through to the kitchen, where Shirley and Molly were preparing supper, their father and mother having gone out to one of the summer resorts with Mr. and Mrs. Ross, taking the children with them.

"Whatever has happened?" cried Molly, as she caught sight of Betty's tear-stained face.

"Just about the worst that could happen," Betty sobbed, as she threw herself into a chair by the kitchen table.

"Don't cry, honey," comforted Shirley, as she dropped the dishcloth and rushed over to put her arms around Betty, who was trying to tell Molly, between sobs, what had taken place.

At first it was so incoherent that neither sister, standing by, could grasp the situation at all, but finally she got control of herself and was able to give a better account of her troubles.

"I had just gone up to the office," she began. "The office staff

THE POWER OF GOLD

leave early, you know, and Miss Mullen, our head saleslady, that is of the smaller departments, asked me to go up to the main office and get her a new sales book. So, you see, I was hunting for it, and, as I told you, all the office staff had gone. So while I was looking where she told me to, in walked that old ass, Gills, all smirking and smiling and said: 'I'll find them, dearie,' and with that he came over to where I was and put his arms around me and kissed me. I was so taken by surprise, and it made me so furious, I just lost my temper completely and simply flew at him. What I didn't say to that fellow wouldn't be worth saying. All the pent-up rage of months was let loose. He tried to stop me, tried to grab my wrists, but I bit him. Didn't we just wreck that office, though. It was an awful mess, and so was I, when the inner office door was suddenly thrown open and there stood Mr. Harwood looking so stern and called out: 'Here, here; what's all this? Don't you dare bite him like that, you little minx,' and striding over to us, he actually grabbed me by the shoulders and shook me. Oh, I was so mad I saw red, and it made me ashamed to think he had caught me in such a tantrum, but when he caught hold of me and actually shook me, that made me furious. I jerked myself free and it was all I could do to keep my hands off him. So I gave him a tongue thrashing instead. Told him what I thought of him to allow a man like Gills to take liberties with girls in his employ. What did he care, so long as he made money, how things went on, or what his employees were like! Oh, I don't know what all I said to him. All I remember is the terrible way I talked, and when I couldn't think of anything more to say, I turned and ran down to the cloakroom for my hat, and then home.

THE POWER OF GOLD

I guess I'll get my walking ticket now, alright."

"Oh, yes," gasped Shirley. "You won't dare to go back."

"What is more," said Molly, looking serious, "you can't get a position anywhere else leaving a record like that behind you."

"I know! I know! Don't say any more, Molly, please. But, oh, I mind more than anything else to think Mr. Harwood saw me in such a rage. How I wish I hadn't talked to him so!"

"Whatever did he say when you turned on him in such a manner?" question Molly.

"Didn't say a word. Just stood there looking at me with that stern, cold expression. Oh, dear, isn't it terrible? I'm so sorry," she cried afresh.

"Never mind, honey," soothed Shirley, "you go to your room and lie down while we get the tea ready. You're all trembling"; and she led Betty into the hall and through to the bedroom, where she opened the window a little wider and smoothed out the pillows.

Betty threw herself down on the bed, the tears still running down her cheeks, while Shirley comforted her, coaxed her not to cry, but try and go to sleep, and then tip-toed out the door, closing it gently behind her. But Betty could not sleep; could do nothing but go over that terrible scene in the office. Finally, through the open window she heard the brakes of a car stopping, the door banging, someone coming up the walk, the bell ringing and Molly answering it. Likely Blake coming to take Molly for a spin, or out to dinner somewhere. Thinking thusly, Betty, hot and fatigued at last, fell into a fitful slumber.

The room was getting dusk when she awoke, with Molly quietly pushing the door open, whispering, "Are you awake?"

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Yes," answered Betty, "come in."

Molly walked softly in and over to the window, drew the blinds and turned on the light, leaving the door ajar and calling Shirley at the same time: "Come on, Shirley, she's awake," and in walked Shirley with a neatly covered tray bearing dainty lettuce and chicken sandwiches, a cup of tea, biscuits, peaches and cream.

"Here's some refreshments for our champion boxer," gaily announced Shirley, as she put the tray on the table beside the bed.

Betty drew herself up with, "Hm, hm, that looks good. I'm as hungry as a bear! Must have fallen asleep. Say, Moll, was that Oliver Blake who came to the door shortly after I lay down? I heard someone."

"No, indeed. That was your late respected employer."

"What?" cried Betty, her mouth open and her eyes staring.

"Yes," assured Molly, "it was. When you have eaten your supper—not before—I'll tell you what he said." Whereat Betty made a dive for the sandwiches and biscuits, grabbing one in each hand, while her sisters sat one on each side of the bed laughing at her antics.

Her supper eaten, the tray pushed aside, she cried: "Now then, hurry! What did he say?"

"To begin with," said Molly, "he was astonished at all you told him. Said if you had come to him and stated your complaint the matter would have been dealt with in the proper manner long ago. He had no idea Mr. Gills was such a bounder. They had thought of him as a good, sensible fellow, and certainly a good business man. Nevertheless, after you left the office, he had it out with Mr. Gills, and dismissed him. So that's that. Mr.

THE POWER OF GOLD

Harwood told me he would be pleased if you would forget the unfortunate incident and return in the morning as usual."

"Molly!" exclaimed the astonished girl, "do you mean he will take me back? Oh, isn't that wonderful, wonderful! Did he ask to see me?" she questioned eagerly.

"Yes, but I told him you were sleeping, so he said not to disturb you; that no doubt you were greatly upset."

The next morning Betty dressed with unusual care, donning her best tailored suit and close-fitting turban, for she felt sure Mr. Harwood would interview her. Likely send word during the morning to have her come to the office, and it would behoove her to look her best and act the part. As she neared the store, her cheeks burned with excited anticipation, for there he was, standing beside his car, which was drawn up at the curb, talking to one of the travellers. Betty hoped fervently that he would turn around, but he went on talking; nor did he see her as she passed him, only glancing in her direction as she turned at the entrance to the store.

Surely he would leave the man, come now and speak with her. But he paid not the slightest attention. When half way down the aisle she surreptitiously glanced back towards the open door and saw him just entering the store still conversing with the traveller, who was coming in with him. Betty felt an odd sense of disappointment as she entered the cloakroom. No use being silly! Dismiss him from her mind—the only sensible thing to do. Thus, with head held high as usual, she took her place at the glove counter. Once during the morning she caught a glimpse of him crossing at the end of the store, and her hands shook as she arranged the gloves on the row of hangers. Perhaps he would

THE POWER OF GOLD

come over. Yes, he was walking up towards her, but he passed on, and Betty could not repress the disappointed sensation; she was so sure he would have stopped. But he never even looked at her.

Then, just about noon, the office boy stopped at her counter to say: "Mr. Harwood would like to see Miss Wainwright in his office."

The blood flew to Betty's cheeks as she asked the boy hurriedly, "When?"

"Now; soon as you can," answered the lad, as he walked away.

Betty left her counter and walked across the store with what assurance she could assume, up the short flight of stairs and through the main office, now filled with bookkeepers and stenographers, and tapped lightly on the door marked "Private." A moment she waited, breathless, and then a pleasant, "Come in." Trembling in spite of herself, she turned the knob and entered. Mr. Harwood was sitting at his desk writing as he had been on her first visit, but this time he looked up immediately, saying with a smile: "Oh, Miss Wainwright," hastily rising to place a chair for her. Standing beside her, a twinkle in his eye, he said: "Feeling less agitated this morning, I trust." Then, more seriously: "I do hope, Miss Wainwright, you will believe me when I say that in no way had I the slightest knowledge of Mr. Gills' behavior. He has been in our employ for fifteen years—ten years before my father retired and five years since taking over the business myself. It so annoyed me, especially learning from other girls in the store of what you had put up with, that my first intention was to dismiss the man entirely. However, I thought better of it this morning and sent for the fellow, and after giving

THE POWER OF GOLD

him, I guess, the straightest talk he has ever had, promised him another chance. He is in the men's clothing department now, so we'll see how that will work out. I certainly apologize to you for what you have been subjected to."

"Oh," stammered Betty, arising, "don't, please don't. It is I who should apologize, and I do, I do, Mr. Harwood. I feel so ashamed. But it made me lose my temper completely."

"I know, Miss Wainwright. I understand. We will let it pass. I know you felt badly over it. Your sister told me."

"Oh, I did, Mr. Harwood. You can't imagine how terrible I felt to think I acted so, and said all those things to you. It gave me a suffocating sensation right here in my heart," and she clutched her throat.

Mr. Harwood smiled with amusement. "That's a bit high to have one's heart, isn't it, in one's throat?"

"Indeed, no," answered Betty quickly, a merry twinkle springing to her eyes. "I have often had my heart in my mouth."

Milton Harwood threw back his head and laughed heartily. "Pretty good, Miss Betty."

"Oh, how did you know my name was Betty?" she gasped astonished.

"Your sister told me that, too," he smiled.

At this instance a rap came to the door and one of the book-keepers entered, after which, with a smile and a nod, Betty took her leave, tingling in every fibre of her being. How her heart sang as she returned to her counter only to find it long past her lunch hour, and she turned to retrace her steps to the cloakroom. She might have gone there direct, had she remembered the time,

THE POWER OF GOLD

place or lunch. How much she would have to tell Molly and Sherely! How delightful! But supposing he didn't know her next time they met. What then? That thought sobered her somewhat.

Each day Betty watched for him, but not a glimpse did she see, and each day she told herself she would watch no more. Then on Friday evening at closing time she heard two of the girls talking in the cloakroom: "Has Mr. Harwood gone on his buying trip to England yet?" one inquired. "No," the other replied, "I believe he is going Saturday night." Betty stood still, staring at the wall, then reaching for her hat, went out. Going to England—but why should she care? How foolish, and with a careless toss of her head, she walked out of the store. On Saturday night Betty took Dorothy for a brisk walk to the mail box, which was three blocks away, to post a letter to her Aunt Alice in England. As they were walking back she suddenly noticed Milton Harwood coming towards them in his roadster. Betty's eyes widened and blinked as she stared incredulously towards the oncoming car, while an excited thrill ran through her. Oh, if he would only look; just see her. Nearer, nearer the roadster came; then, as he was passing, he glanced in her direction and with a smile of recognition reached for the brake and drew the car to the curb.

"Well, well, if it isn't Miss Betty Wainwright, no less; and where might you be off to this fine evening?"

Betty stood still one second and then crossed the grass to the curb. She knew she was blushing hotly, but managed a somewhat disconcerted greeting. Mr. Harwood noticed her evident confusion and hastened to put her at her ease by saying, with a cordial smile:

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Jump in, both of you, and I'll drive you home." And he got out to assist Betty to the seat beside him, looking down at her small companion. "Who is this little miss?"

"This is my little sister, Dorothy."

"I see. Well, come, Dorothy, let me lift you in," and putting the child between them, he took his seat at the wheel.

"We have just been posting a letter to catch the English mail," said Betty, recovering her composure in a measure.

"Well, you caught him," laughed Mr. Harwood. Betty laughed too, and blushed when she asked: "Why didn't you start for England today. I thought you were to have done so?"

"No, my plans are changed. We have a buyer; he is going. I didn't think it advisable to leave." Then smiling down at her: "It is such a wonderful night, Miss Betty, how about taking this wee girl home and you come for a spin. Will you?"

"Why, yes, thank you, I suppose I could. Only I don't know whether Mother or Dad will be home yet. The others are all out."

"That doesn't matter," chimed in Dorothy. "Mother and Dad are only over at Rosses, you see," turning her big blue eyes to Milton Harwood, "my two sisters are out, but I can put myself to bed and Ronny can mind his self. You can go, Betty. Go on, you never get a chance to go driving much." While Betty appreciated the child's offer and insistence that she should go, nevertheless she would just as soon Dorothy wouldn't tell too much. But Dorothy was in her element, and went ruthlessly on:

"Do coax her, Mr. Harwood," she begged. "She would just love to go, 'cause Betty thinks you're lovely."

Mr. Harwood threw back his head and gave one of his hearty

THE POWER OF GOLD

laughs, but Betty, being not quite sure of what Dorothy might say next, gave the child's arm a little warning squeeze. The squeeze Dorothy felt, but the warning entirely escaped her, for she immediately cried out: "Oh, Betty, don't squeeze my arm like that," and she jerked herself away, while Mr. Harwood's laugh rang out once more.

"This is the house," Betty informed him, her face scarlet, but thankful to find herself in front of the "White Bungalow" and Dorothy's opportunity of imparting information at an end.

"Well, you take this little chatterbox in and come for a ride, won't you?" he asked coaxingly.

"Well, really, on second thought I don't think I can, thank you," replied Betty. "I would love to, but the kiddies, you know—I must stay with them."

"I see. Some other time, then?" and with a smile and a wave to Dorothy, he was off.

Betty bundled Dorothy off to bed the moment they got in. Ron was painting by the dining-room table, and Betty, to hurry things along, promised them each a chocolate if they were in bed in ten minutes. Of course, that turned the trick, and going to the buffet drawer in the dining-room, she returned to the children's room bearing their reward.

At last alone, she went to her own room to sit by the open window and gaze out on the beauties of the summer night, made a thousand times more beautiful by the joyous singing of her heart.

When Shirley and Molly came home later in the evening they found her still at the window, with a wistful, dreamy look

THE POWER OF GOLD

in her eyes, but she was soon restored to her usual animated self when relating to them what she termed a wonderful experience. Shirley and Molly were greatly interested, exclaiming from time to time, as Betty told them almost word for word of what had taken place, and they roared with merriment at Dorothy's part in the conversation and of Mr. Harwood's evident amusement.

All the following week Betty was extremely happy, though at times overcome with an excited uncertainty as to whether he would remember to take her for that postponed drive. She told herself so often it might never be. Why should it? He had to say something, and that was as non-committal as anything else. So it was with the greatest surprise she heard his voice the next Saturday evening shortly after getting home for work. Could it really be he asking: "How about that promised drive; Miss Betty? Can you come tonight, say about eight o'clock?"

"Why, yes, that would be lovely. Yes, I can be ready by eight," and she hung up before realizing how very brief she had been—never even thanked him. Why, how stupid. Just like her to lose her head completely. But she must hurry now; have supper; get ready and be on time. With Shirley and Molly both helping, lending her this, suggesting that, her toilette was soon complete, and it was a very jaunty looking Betty who opened the door for Mr. Harwood, and brought him into the living-room to introduce him to her mother.

"And how," he asked, ten minutes later as he took his place beside her in the big blue roadster, "is Miss Betty this evening, and where may her heart be tonight?"

"Not on my sleeve, at any rate," she retorted.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"I'll bet not," chuckled Mr. Harwood. "Now where would you like to go?"

"Anywhere, Mil—oh, I mean Mr. Harwood," and Betty corrected herself quickly, blushing a rosy hue, her companion enjoying her confusion.

"Supposing we go over to the Yacht Club, then; they are giving a flannel dance tonight."

"Very well, I would like that," assented Betty. "I've never been to a flannel dance in my life."

"Have you not?" answered Mr. Harwood in surprise, "Well, this will be your initial flannel dance. Hope you'll enjoy it. You see, they give each girl a flannel suit to dance in"; this with a humorous gleam in his eye.

"Is that so?" Betty was alert with mock earnestness. "How lovely! That 'suits' me, and seeing it's a flannel dance, I suppose it takes the form of a moth ball?"

"Why, yes, I expect it is, at that," Milton carried on the humor. "I always bring butterflies myself; that is, social butterflies, you understand."

"I see, Mr. Harwood, you believe in flying high. You should not have brought me, then, for I'm not a social butterfly"; this with subtle terseness.

"Oh, don't find fault with my wit, Miss Betty, please." Milton was contrite. "Seriously, I haven't much use for social butterflies. I like girls who have some thought apart from just having a good time. There's more to live for than merely a social round of gaiety. However, here we are. Nice clubhouse, isn't it, Betty? Fine floor for dancing; but, of course, it's only for members.

THE POWER OF GOLD

Supper served and everything, and all for two dollars. Cheap, isn't it?"

"What, the dance?" asked Betty.

"Well, yes, my child; you didn't expect it was the clubhouse, did you?"

"I was going to say," Betty smiled, "if it was, I'd take two. In that case I would have a club sandwich."

"No," laughed Milton, "no! It couldn't be a sandwich without anything between. They generally have lettuce, chicken, pickle and stuff, don't they, in club sandwiches?"

"The orchestra, I expect, is generally pickled, and there'll be lots of chickens there, too, won't there?"

Milton laughed. "You're some chicken yourself, young lady, but if I don't get my car parked properly I'll sure be in a pickle when it comes to getting out, wedged in here among all these cars."

"Not anything like a pickle; it will be quite sweet, don't you think?"

"Betty, child, what do you mean? You don't expect it will be very sweet for me to get out from all those cars do you?"

"Why, yes, you'll be in a jam, won't you?"

Milton chuckled. The car parked at last to his satisfaction, he assisted Betty to alight.

And so began their friendship. Each Saturday night they went driving and sometimes during the week Milton took her to dinner at some fashionable restaurant. And before long he knew all about the home in England, still so beloved by Betty; her school life, of how she disliked clerking; was undecided what occupation to follow, and it was at his suggestion and advice that she finally

THE POWER OF GOLD

gave up her position at the glove counter to take a business course. Milton promised her a position in his office as stenographer when she was finished, at a salary of one hundred dollars a month. Therefore, the first of September found Betty attending business college—the same one Molly graduated from some two years previous.

* * * * *

Her mother was delighted at this opportunity for Betty to become a more efficient wage earner. They could afford to do something more towards the girls' education, now that Philip was so prosperous. And when Shirley evidenced a desire to resume her music, which she showed great talent for, it was decided she would enter a conservatory of music, which opened in September, and give up, definitely, her position at the Emporium.

"What satisfaction to give the girls these opportunities," Margaret remarked to her husband one evening early in September, as they sat together on the veranda, watching the shadows flit through the trees, the cool evening breeze gently swaying the autumn-tinted branches. Margaret drew her wrap more closely. "Soon we shall have to sit in the living-room in the evenings, Philip. It is even now growing chilly. How much happier and well situated we are this September, than last!"

"Yes," replied Philip, "last year was a terror. It's a nightmare to me yet. Those times Cliff and I were out of work and no money—nothing—coming in. Looking back, I don't see how we managed to live. If it hadn't been for your thrift and good

THE POWER OF GOLD

management, Margaret, I'm afraid it would have played havoc with us all."

"It's over, Phil, dear; and, really, none of us are the worse for it. Even Ron, how strong and sturdy he has become. I am so happy, Phil! The children are all so well and getting along so nicely. Cliff is doing well, too, and I think he should soon be getting back to his law course, don't you?"

"Yes, we can afford it now. Really, Margaret, I have done splendidly after all in those speculations with Blake. Cleaned up another five thousand last week. That is why I want to buy a home and give the youngsters a real good time. We can afford it. My bank account has climbed up to some fifty thousand dollars this summer, more than I've ever had."

"Yes, I admit you have been very successful, Philip; but I want to go cautiously. I suppose it is a case of the 'burnt child.' However, I do agree with you as regards the wisdom of buying a home, Phil, certainly, but if I had my way I would suggest we buy one at ten or twelve thousand and furnish it nicely. We don't require a large place, just an eight-room house would do. Nice large living-room for the young folks, and dining-room and a den which you and I could use as we did at home in England; a kitchen and four bedrooms would be sufficient. I would like that very much. By the way, Phil, have you ever heard anything about those shares you bought with that two thousand—the oil shares, you know?"

"Not a word. I haven't seen the man from that day to this."

"Then let it go," said Margaret. "We have enough without it. But don't be caught like that again, Phil."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"I'll buy nothing but what Blake advises me to. I'll never lose, don't fear; and we can well afford a nice place, too. That's why I wish you would consider buying a really fine home—a large one. I have been through some dandy ones lately, been looking around a bit, you know, with the real estate agents."

"At what price, Phil?"

"Oh, around twenty-five or thirty thousand."

"Why, Phil, such a huge price to pay; the upkeep and all! I'm afraid that is too much for us to handle. Fancy us contemplating such an expensive proposition, when less than a year ago we hadn't enough to eat!"

"Yes, Margaret, it does tend to make one feel as though it is a dream. But, then, you know some fortunes are made overnight."

"That's true, Phil; but some are lost over-night, too. Then it isn't a dream, but a nightmare. However, we'll see. I'll think it over." And she did. Moreover, she talked about it with Cliff the next day as they had lunch together.

Cliff had come home at noon, an unusual thing for him, as he always lunched in town; but he was going away on a short trip for his firm and his train didn't leave till three o'clock. Margaret loved these little chats with her son. She could tell him so many of her ideas—he would always understand and was kind and helpful. As they sat in the cheery dining-room eating the dainty meal Margaret had prepared for him, she spoke of the proposed plan of buying a home; also of his father's steadily growing bank account.

"Well," said Cliff, "I fully expect Dad to succeed, for there's

THE POWER OF GOLD

Blake; he knows the game and advises him wisely. I don't think you need have a fear, Mother. Let him buy an expensive house if he wants to; why not?"

"I suppose he might," his mother assented with reluctance. "Only we are getting along so nicely now, and I can't help feeling a sense of trepidation at the thought of any high-priced place. I would much rather, if I had my way, buy one of those stucco English type houses. I told your father about them. I have been to see some of them, and they are pretty—centre hall, living-room on one side, dining-room, kitchen and a cute little breakfast alcove, four bedrooms upstairs. I can get one a block the other side of Ross' for twelve thousand. Now if Dad would only buy that and put the balance in—say, city debentures, or railroad stock—something safe—my mind would be easy and I shouldn't worry about the future. But I do wish he would stop speculating. I tried to make him see all this last night, but—"

"Sweeps you off your feet, doesn't it, Mom, this making money so fast?" and Cliff rose from the table. "Well, when I get back from this trip I will talk with him."

But when Cliff returned, things had taken a very definite turn. He arrived one evening about nine o'clock. His father and mother had gone to an art exhibit, which Philip never tired of, and where Margaret always accompanied him. Shirley and Betty, with Doctor Ellis and Milton Harwood, had gone to see a very well-known English actor who was playing in one of the leading theatres. Molly was alone at home with the children and had them both in bed when Cliff arrived. No sooner had he settled himself with Molly by the fire in the living-room, as it was near

THE POWER OF GOLD

the end of September and the nights were chilly, than Dorothy tip-toed down, a little white-robed figure, peaking through the portieres from the hall; then, a smile lighting her face, "Oh, I just knew it was you!" And she skipped across the room and jumped into Cliff's outstretched arms. "At first I thought it was Mr. Blake (Betty calls him the Elephant), but I knew it couldn't be, 'cause he kind of stamps when he walks. I guess it's 'cause he's so big."

"Well, well! He does, eh?" said Cliff, as he stroked her golden curls, "but you shouldn't speak of anyone like that; neither should Betty."

"No, I don't fink we should, Cliff, 'cause I guesses Mr. Blake likes us awful well to do so much for Daddy. Mother says that Daddy's made a lot more money account a Mr. Blake, and we bought a lovely house. It's a dandy, isn't it, Molly? We're going to move directly. Mummy says she isn't so awful glad; but I am! so's Betty and Shirley. And, oh, say, Cliff, it has a flagpole, too, and Daddy is going to put up a flag. I like flags flying. We saw whole lots of them that time in a summer when Daddy and Mummy took me and Ron to—what's that place? Oh, yes, I know, the 'Nighted States.' Do you 'member? And when it got to be my birthday on a Fourth of July, they put flags up everywhere and had fireworks. I don't know how they knew it was my birthday."

"That was great, now, wasn't it?" smiled Cliff.

"And, oh, Cliff. Our new house has nice shiny hardware floors, too."

"I guess you mean hardwood, don't you?" laughed Cliff.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Yes, I suppose that's it."

"Well," said Molly, turning to the door, "here's another!" as she saw Ron grinning from the parted curtains.

"Well, well," greeted Cliff. "Come in, old pal. How's the world using you, anyway?"

"Fine," answered Ron, "and I have lots of worms ready to go fishing Saturday. You said if you got home in time you would take me, so I got the worms ready to go, anyway."

"That's so; and go we will. We'll start early, make a day of it. Now you youngsters scamper off to bed." And he lifted Dorothy off his knee and started them off on a race, Ron giving Dorothy a head start, winking at Cliff as he did so, obviously so she would win.

"My, he is a fine little chap," said Cliff when he and Molly were alone again; "a deep thinker, too! You would be surprised the things he talks to me about when we're out on our tramps. Says he want to be an artist, but wants to do lots of things for people, so they will be good and happy. Has all sorts of schemes in his little head. Thinks everyone, if they can afford it, should each help one poor person. His idea, apparently, is to try to eliminate poverty entirely. Wants each one of our family to help carry out the scheme. Smart kid; turn out an idealist, likely. However, Molly, how is everything? What was Dorothy talking about? Has Dad really bought a house?"

"I should say he has bought a house—a beauty, all furnished. The people are going South. Bought everything, even to their cars—a Franklin limousine and roadster."

"What did it cost him, Moll? How did he manage? Not in debt, I hope!"

THE POWER OF GOLD

"No, he isn't in debt one cent, thanks to Mr. Blake. You see, things have been going unusually brisk in the stock market. Dad had about fifty thousand last month. Well, this month he has a great deal more than double it, and still going strong. The place he bought and all that went with it cost fifty thousand, and that, I believe, was away under the market value. There was a mortgage of ten thousand, but Mother persuaded him, if he were purchasing it at all, to pay off the mortgage. So they don't owe a cent on anything."

"That's fine, Moll. He has done splendidly. Of course, it's Blake we have to thank. But what a change from this time last year, Moll! We didn't know where our next meal was coming from. I sure am glad I'm doing better, too. Rather like this insurance business. Find it very interesting and, with commissions, it is netting me two hundred a month. I guess I'll stay with it till Christmas. Then in the new year I'll take up my law course again. How is Roger, Molly? He will be home at Christmas, won't he?"

"Oh, yes. We'll be married Christmas week, I expect. That is, between Christmas and New Year's. He is preparing the house; doing little things around to make it more comfortable for me. He writes in today's letter that Chung is very anxious to have everything nice when Roger brings me out there, and he is making inside window boxes for flowers in the living room, dining-room and kitchen himself. Says they are for Mrs. Bossy Lady."

"You'll keep him for cook, won't you?"

"Yes, Roger wants me to."

Cliff rose to replenish the fire, after which he seated himself

THE POWER OF GOLD

comfortably, drawing his chair up a little closer. "How are the girls, Molly?"

"Just fine. Shirley is completely infatuated with Doctor Ellis, and he with Shirley. And Betty—well, I'm not quite so sure about her, though she is still going out steadily with Milton Harwood; but I don't know how serious he is; and if he is not, I'm afraid it is going to go hard with poor Betty."

But if they could have seen Betty at that moment they would have had no doubt of her happiness. They had had a wonderful evening and were just starting home. Shirley and the Doctor had gone ahead in the little Ford coupe. Milton helped Betty into the roadster and took the seat beside her, saying: "Such a night! Look at those stars and the moon. What say to a little spin, Betty?"

"Don't you think it's pretty late, Mr. Harwood?" and Betty settled down snugly; "but the spin if you like. I don't care, I'm comfy."

"And happy?" asked Milton, looking down with a smile.

"Oh, sure, always happy."

"But a little happier when we are together; isn't that it, Betty, dear?" and Milton slipped an arm around her, drawing her closer to him. The color mounted to Betty's face. Oh, could this be true? Was she dreaming?

"Oh, Mr. Harwood," she gasped, "you take my breath away."

Milton laughed. "Do I, Betty? Well, how's this?" and bringing the car to a standstill at the side of the road, he took the astonished girl in his arms and kissed her rosy lips.

"Oh," she breathed, "oh, Mr. Harwood!"

THE POWER OF GOLD

Milton laughed, as he teasingly asked: "Does that take your breath away, too, dear?"

But Betty's face was hidden in her hands. No answer came. Gently Milton took her hands down from her face, tightly holding them in one of his as he bent closer. "What! Not crying, Betty?" he exclaimed.

"No, no," she replied, freeing one of her hands and dabbing her eyes with her handkerchief.

"Then, why the tears?" Milton looked at her face anxiously.

"Oh, I don't know," and Betty looked up with a glimpse of a smile. "You said you were going to take me for a spin, but—you didn't tell me you were going to make my head spin."

"And did I, Betty?" there was relief in Milton's voice.

"Yes, you did. You made it spin so much I pretty near lost it."

"Well, well; isn't that terrible!" Milton spoke in mock concern. "And may I ask what you would have done if you lost your head?"

"Dear knows, Mr. Harwood," replied Betty, "I never know what I'm going to do."

"I believe you, Betty Wainwright. I think that's what makes me like you so well—keeps me guessing; sort of intrigues my interest."

"Hm, it does, eh? Well, it doesn't mine. I don't like being so impulsive. I wish I wasn't. Keeps me in hot water half of my time."

"You often have that effect on me, too, Betty; but, on the whole, I like it," and his lips brushed her cheek. "Altogether you

THE POWER OF GOLD

are a great girl, Betty; different from any other I've ever met, and one thing I'm going to ask you to do and that is to call me by my first name—Milton. Mr. Harwood seems so formal, and I don't want you to be formal with me. What do you say, Betty, will you?"

"Oh, I don't know if I could. It, oh—takes my breath away some more."

"Try it and see. That's the girl," and he laughingly patted her cheek, turning her face towards him. "Come, look at me. Tell me you'll call me Milton after this."

Then Betty, lifting her eyes to his, whispered softly: "Yes, Milton, I will."

Instantly his face lit with a sober, earnest expression, as he drew Betty to him, kissing the full red lips tenderly, as he murmured in reply: "Thank you—darling."

The house was in darkness when the girls arrived home. Shirley and the Doctor had driven up first.

"No sign of the other half of our foursome," remarked the Doctor, peering down the street. "Better sit out here and wait for them, then I'll race Milton back to town."

"Yes?" laughed Shirley, "with a little Ford, and him with a six-cylinder roadster?"

"Well, I hope to afford a better car some day, Shirley. At present I have my money all in bonds. Later on I intend building a small hospital for the poor. Do something to alleviate men's suffering; people who can't afford to pay, you understand. However, after awhile I'm going to be extravagant and buy myself a nice car. Meanwhile, you don't mind the Ford coupe, do you?"

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Oh, my, no, Don! Don't think that, please. I was only making fun of it for fun, that's all."

"I see; I am glad, Shirley, dear," and he bent down to kiss her. "Some day I want to tell you all my plans concerning this charitable work I'm interested in. You'll help me, won't you, Shirley?"

"Oh, yes, Don, I will; and I think it is so splendid of you to spend your money that way."

"Well, dear, the credit is not due to me. I had a very wonderful father who did much to assist humanity in many ways, and I know full well the disposition he would want the money he left put to."

CHAPTER XX.

When the Wainwrights took over their new home they were one and all enchanted with the beautifully furnished, spacious rooms. Soft, full-piled rugs, large easy chairs, heavy draperies. This, indeed, was a home to be proud of. The cars, too! The roadster Philip gave to Cliff as his own. Margaret was to use the limousine. He had also purchased a coupe for the girls to drive. Philip was so glad, so delighted to give these luxuries to his family. Nothing seemed too much for their father to do for them to make up for their former hardships.

Margaret had sold the full contents of the "White Bungalow" to a second-hand dealer and, strange as it may seem, it was with reluctant feet that she turned from the bungalow to the waiting car—her car. Philip had persuaded her to retain the servants of the home they had purchased, and now the chauffeur stood beside the waiting car to drive her home.

When she arrived, the lights ablaze everywhere, the gramophone was playing, and Mr. Blake, who had called with a particular friend of his, a Major Cole, was dancing with one of the girls in the living-room, while Dot and Ronald were scampering in and out of the rooms. Cliff and his father were in the den reading the paper. Presently the housemaid announced dinner. "In about ten minutes, Minnie," Margaret told her, and rushed upstairs to dress.

Oliver Blake and the Major remained to dinner, which disappointed Margaret somewhat. She would much have preferred

THE POWER OF GOLD

to have been alone with her family on this, their first night in the new home. But Philip was pleased, especially as Major Cole was an old-timer—knew so many families. Philip thought it might be a help socially for the family. During the conversation at dinner, Margaret learned, to her dismay, of Major Cole's extremely broad views on questions of drinking, gambling, also his loose ideas of marriage, he himself being divorced. These things caused Margaret much worry.

The next two months were one round of gaiety. Major Cole's sisters called. They were pretty girls, one married to a rather prominent man about town, a Mr. Heanley. Both girls were bright and vivacious, but distinctly shallow. Margaret was not favorably impressed with either of them. Mr. Blake's aunt and cousin called also.

"Hm," remarked Betty, "why have we not heard of them before? They surely were never asked by Blake to call when we were in the bungalow."

"Never mind, Betty," answered Shirley, "'we know very well it's because we have a nice home and money.'"

"Well, well," replied Betty, "even little unsophisticated sister realizes that, does she?"

Yet, as time passed, they grew to like the friends Oliver Blake introduced them to; also to enjoy the numerous social functions which included the Wainwrights among the guests. They joined with much enthusiasm in these festivities. That is to say, the young folks did. Margaret neither approved nor could she be prevailed upon to participate in them, and her husband was quite contented to let Cliff and the girls go, while he spent his evenings

THE POWER OF GOLD

quietly at home. But so far as approving or disapproving was concerned, Philip was neutral. If the family wanted to indulge in such pastimes, he was quite satisfied. He tried to reason with his wife to this effect: Had he not promised the children a good time, once they could afford it? Well, then, let them have it! Chances are, it would do them good, tend to broaden them.

Margaret took no such philosophical view of the situation. It was not her idea of a good time for their children, and very reluctantly she consented to the acceptance of all these social engagements.

But as the weeks flew by, the time was almost entirely spent in teas, luncheons and dinner parties and dancing till the "wee small hours." This state of affairs had a marked effect on the girls, and also Cliff. Shirley could not continue her music studies as formerly, though she still practiced a short time each day when the lessons didn't interfere too much with her many social engagements. When one or the other had to be left, it was invariably the lessons. Betty had much the same experience. Her course was almost completed, but it was impossible to make any headway with a business course and dance half the night; consequently it was not long before Betty stopped her lessons entirely. Why continue shorthand and typing, anyway? Her Dad was simply coining money. None of the girls in their social "set" worked. Why should she and Shirley? Fortune had smiled on them. All they had to do was sit back and enjoy it to the utmost.

Cliff also slipped back in his work. The raise he expected didn't come. Nor was he sent on any more business trips for the office. Scarcely a night was he in bed till after two, and some-

THE POWER OF GOLD

times later. Seldom did a big dance break up till three, the consequence being, when he arrived at the office in the morning, he was heavy-eyed, sleepy and listless. The money question was not worrying him very much, either. Dad was making money—piles of it! Urged them all to have, what he termed, a good time. So why not? He would go on with his legal course sooner or later, but not yet. Take things easy for a while. Their father certainly was making money faster than ever. Had given up his position with Oliver Blake, but was down every morning watching the stock market and buying and selling, according to Oliver Blake's advice.

The afternoons Philip spent mostly next door to the office, in a very attractive and finely equipped art store. Here he would live to the fullest among the wonderful paintings, etchings, and so forth, which held such great attraction for him.

But Molly kept to her work just as diligently and faithfully as ever. Only in the evenings did she relax and join the others in their gaieties, though never to the same extent. Oliver Blake and Major Cole were constant visitors to the new home. Indeed, most of Molly's leisure hours were spent in Oliver's company. Even the letters to Roger had suffered to some extent, her time being so fully occupied. This, the family could not comprehend at all. Even Roger had difficulty in understanding why Molly's letters were so short and far between. Many a time he questioned her on this point, but Molly was always evasive, promising that they would soon be together, so Roger was content.

Major Cole and Shirley were constantly together. Doctor Ellis came but seldom, for it was rarely he could get an evening

THE POWER OF GOLD

alone with Shirley, and when the girls tried to prevail on him to join their parties, he would invariably decline, telling them that late hours were not conducive to a doctor's success, and since he neither indulged in drinking, gambling, nor roadhouses, was afraid he would put a damper on their fun. Hence, they saw less and less of him. Nor did they have the former companionship of Milton Harwood. Milton openly told Betty he had neither time nor inclination for such a life, and endeavored to induce her to finish the business course and come in the office where the promised position was still open to her.

"Oh, let me have my fling first," Betty would say. "A taste of all the sweet things of life. Let me try my wings with high flying; then, when I'm tired of flitting, I'll settle down to work—perhaps—maybe." And so the question was dropped.

Though Margaret felt that Shirley and Betty were drifting from her, from the home ties, yet she seemed powerless to prevent it. Molly, too, sensed this fact, and it saddened her. One night when she walked home from the office her memory reverted to the time when the girls were working—how they would all meet coming home at night; what good times they had; what fun, relating to each other items of interest in their day's routine—humorous incidents that had occurred. But now the girls had many friends she had nothing in common with. Molly seemed outside their life completely. Who would have thought that these two sisters of hers would be swept off their feet in this way! There seemed almost as great a breach between the girls and herself now as between the girls and Doctor Ellis and Milton Harwood. Whatever had come over Betty and Shirley, anyway, always running

THE POWER OF GOLD

around with Major Cole and Jim Crane, the latter a worthless son of a millionaire. They certainly travelled with a fast crowd. Moreover, she knew they indulged in cocktails. Yes, and smoked, too! It had been a terrible shock to learn these facts. If she could only keep their mother from knowing! Molly recalled the old desire they had in times past of shielding their mother from the hard places. Yes, they had been hard! Life had been something of a struggle, alright; but they had borne the trials together, happy in each other's companionship and sympathy. Now she seemed so alone; the girls were no longer companions. They had wandered off by themselves down paths which Molly found anything but alluring, with friends neither helpful nor desirable; the whole environment disastrous to their well-being. At this point in her moody reflections the tears filled her eyes, and the more she pursued this train of thought the more sad and alone she felt, till presently she could no longer check her emotions, and, turning into a quiet side street, let the tears come, walking more slowly that she might recover her composure before she reached home. Arriving at the gate, she met her mother coming from the opposite direction.

"Well, dear," smiled Margaret, taking hold of her daughter's arm as they turned in at the gate and sauntered slowly up the walk, "how are you, Molly?"

"I'm fine, as usual, Mother. Why do you ask me that? Don't I look alright?"

"Why do I ask? You can't fool your Mother. Something has upset you. Is it Roger? I mean, has it to do with Roger?"

"Why, Mother, what makes you think that? You know it's

THE POWER OF GOLD

just a short time now till Christmas. Then Roger will be down, we will be married, and I will return with him."

"Yes," answered Margaret, thoughtfully. "Come in to the den before you take your things off, dear, and let us have a few minutes to ourselves before the others come in. We have so little time together these days."

"We certainly don't have very much time together," answered Molly, as they went into the den, closing the door quietly behind them. The sound of the children's voices echoed from the breakfast room.

Both Margaret and Molly stood before the smouldering fire, Molly putting one foot, then the other towards the warm blaze, leaning against the mantle as she resumed: "I would love to have our old-time chats with the family, but there's always someone coming in with the girls or Cliff. We're never alone as we used to be. My, I get tired of it, Mother!"

"That is just what I meant to speak about, Molly. You know, dear, you are with Mr. Blake so much these days and so often he is here to dinner. Not that I mind, Molly," she added hastily, "but do you think it is fair to Roger? I don't want to pry into your affairs, dear, but Roger is such a fine man, so noble." Again she paused and looked at Molly, who raised her head, meeting her mother's gaze, smiling as she did so.

"Don't let my friendship with Oliver Blake bother you, Mother. You may rest assured he is not usurping Roger's place in my affections. Just let matters rest for the time being." She straightened up and, putting out her hand to pat her mother's shoulder, continued: "No, don't spend your mental energies on me,

THE POWER OF GOLD

Mother, dear. You have plenty to do worrying about your other 'bairnies,' me thinks. Here they are coming now, and the usual crowd with them, I expect."

"Yes, I suppose I have plenty else to worry me. Those girls do cause me a lot of concern, Molly; not Cliff, he is alright, but Shirley and Betty. They seem to have wandered too far away from the rest of us. It makes me feel so badly at times. They're not like my girls at all. I guess riches are like everything else, you've got to pay the price for them. I suppose we can't have everything. It's what we want most that we bend every effort to secure, and riches are what Dad wants most for his family."

As she finished speaking, Betty flung open the door and came into the room with Shirley behind her.

"Well, I never!" Betty opened her eyes wide. "Molly and Mother standing in front of the fire with their wraps on. You'll roast!"

"No, we won't," answered Molly. "There isn't enough fire here to warm a flea," and she kicked the half-turned stick over with her foot.

"What's the topic of conversation, may I inquire?" asked Shirley, clasping her hands behind her golden head and throwing herself into an easy chair.

"Us, I'll bet a dime," spoke up Betty, moving to the table to pick up the evening paper.

"Perhaps so," smiled Molly. "By the way, I thought you were bringing Major Cole and Jim Crane home to dinner?"

"No, they couldn't come. The four of us are going to a private theatrical tonight. I want like the dickens to go. Jim

THE POWER OF GOLD

isn't so keen about it; but I am. You bet I'm going to have what I want!"

"Yes, Betty," quietly answered her mother on her way to the hall, "we usually get what we want most. I'll qualify that statement by saying we bend every effort to procure what seems to us essential to our happiness."

Betty grinned. "Well, I want a millionaire husband."

"Or the son of one," supplemented Shirley.

"Do I get him, Mom?" called Betty, tauntingly after her mother.

"I don't know, but I will say you're doing your best to," answered her mother, looking back from the doorway.

"I'll say you are, too," agreed Molly, following her mother out of the room, "and a lot of trouble you'll get along with him; for, believe me, Betty, Jim Crane is nothing but a drunken sot, and you'll rue the day if you ever marry him."

"Oh, dry up and blow away," saucily replied Betty. "He's lots of fun, anyway. What else matters?"

CHAPTER XXI.

One of the prominent social functions of the season was that given by Major Cole's married sister, Mrs. Heanley, which was to prove the cause of many subsequent events.

Molly, who, in company with Oliver, arrived late, passed through the hall on her way to the dressing-room, noticing a crowd of young people around the punch bowl in the den. Major Cole, Shirley, Betty and Jim were amongst them. She felt uneasy, and more so when she saw several of the girls trying hard to induce Cliff to join them. Shirley and Betty took glass after glass, and when Molly returned from the dressing-room she saw Betty and Jim with their arms around each other, singing and carrying on most hilariously.

Molly watched them with disgust. 'How could her sister act so—drinking like a toper and cutting up with those fast young fellows? She turned away, sick at heart. Well, she was glad Cliff hadn't touched the stuff, anyway; something to be thankful for. He was stronger willed than the girls; not so easily influenced, but the dance was spoiled for her. Still, she must keep an eye on the girls. She did wish Cliff had more influence over them. Or did he try to exercise the influence he did have? Molly wondered.

Twice during the evening she appealed to him, saying: "Cliff, for pity's sake, see that the girls don't drink too much!" this as she was passing him with her partner; but he merely nodded his acquiescence and went on. Again, later in the evening, during an intermission, he was standing beside Myrtle Cole when Molly

THE POWER OF GOLD

approached him with the almost pleading request that he speak to the girls; they were drinking far too much. But this time he frowned and said: "Sh," with a look towards Myrtle, who, glancing up, intercepted it with a laugh.

"Is Molly scared for the poor little sisters, eh?" she asked, scoffingly. "Leave them alone; don't be a wet blanket, girl! A little gin and a few cocktails aren't going to damage them any," she said, sneeringly. "Come on, Cliff, let's dance," and as the orchestra struck up, Molly moved away. No use expecting Cliff to help with such a girl for his companion, and nowadays he was always with Myrtle.

Molly looked around for Betty. There she was, standing with Jim.

"Betty," she began as she approached her; but Betty was turning in the opposite direction and didn't hear her till Jim, his eyes blurred and bloodshot, put an arm around her shoulder, saying: "Here, Betty, turn around. Big sister wants to talk to you. Guess she's going to give you a lecture; something about that expression she's wearing doesn't look too pleasing to the eye."

Betty turned. "Well, what's wrong, hurry!" as Molly hesitated. "We're just going to dance," and Molly, bending her head, whispered:

"Please, Betty, you and Shirley be careful of that punch."

"Sure, we'll be careful of it," cried Betty, a little too loudly. "We'll be careful not to waste any. It's real good, that's why it makes our heads 'reel' a bit," whereupon Jim, with a loud whoop, grabbed Betty around the waist. "Hot stuff, Betty! Say, you're a peach," and he whirled her away among the dancers.

THE POWER OF GOLD

Molly stood still, biting her lips. In a moment Oliver joined her.

"What's wrong, Molly? Come on, let's dance," and he frowned down at her impatiently. "See, everyone is looking at you! We can't stand here," as she made no motion to move. "Come on, I say," placing an arm around her waist ready to swing into step.

"Don't, Oliver; don't, please. I don't want to dance," and she turned towards the side of the room, to the window seat, Blake following her.

"Whatever is it, Molly?" he asked petulantly, as he reached her side.

Without answering, she motioned him to sit down. "Wait for me here," she said, "I want to speak to Shirley."

"I'll find her for you," was the not any too generous offer, his face still wearing a dissatisfied expression.

"I'll find her myself," and Molly slipped in and out among the dancers, leaving Oliver glowering after her.

"Confound the girl," he muttered. "I'll take a lot of that stubbornness out of her once she's my wife! Have no nonsense; make her toe the line!"

During this soliloquy of Blake's, Molly had found and had talked with Shirley, imploring her not to touch another drop, appealing to her finer senses, and knew she was making headway by Shirley's serious, passive little face, when Major Cole, seeing the sisters standing in such earnest conversation, rudely interrupted with: "What misdemeanor has Shirley perpetrated to cause this lecture, Molly?" and the Major tipped back and forth on his toes, his hands clasped behind his back, while he gave Molly

THE POWER OF GOLD

a half-mocking smile. "Come, I bet it's because the child tasted a little of that harmless punch and sipped a little gin?"

"Yes," bristled Molly, her head held high, "we were not brought up in a barroom, which, with all due respect to our hostess, this place resembles. Neither do we approve of such drinking and carousing. I can call it nothing else. Look at that, for instance," and she motioned towards a chesterfield on which half reclined two couples, their arms clasped around each other, as they boisterously sang a drinking song.

Major Cole, his face black with rage, turned to look at them a second, then towards Molly, anger gleaming from his eyes. "A little petting party, that's all," he scoffed. "And I'm forced to remind you, Miss Wainwright, that this happens to be my sister's hospitality you're partaking of," and again he glared angrily down at her.

"Oh, I'm sorry," stammered Molly, apologetically. In her agitation, it had entirely escaped her mind whose house they were in, and she hung her head in shame, as Shirley looked askance at her, murmuring:

"Oh, Molly, that's awful!"

"I should say it is!" declared Cole furiously, and drawing Shirley's arm through his, turned and left her.

Molly, trembling with excitement and confusion, found her way back to Oliver, who was standing near where she had left him, smoking and chatting with several other men. With a nod to each, she requested Oliver to call the car—she was going home. Oliver opened his mouth to expostulate, but seeing the determined set of her face, and the unshed tears, thought better of it, merely

THE POWER OF GOLD

telling her to get her wraps—that he was ready, although he didn't act at all pleased.

On the way home he was anything but docile or amiable when Molly cited the facts to him of how she had spoken to his friend, Major Cole, forgetting it was his sister's home. Molly's first inclination was not to tell Oliver, but she decided that would be stupid, as, no doubt, the Major would tell Oliver himself, and he would make things as bad as possible. Oliver was angry, and it taxed Molly's efforts to the utmost to appease him; consequently, by the time they got home she was thoroughly upset.

Letting herself in with a latch-key, she went straight upstairs to bed, there to lie awake pondering on all these worries and perplexities.

After some time she heard Cliff and the girls come in and, turning on the light to look at her watch, saw that it was a quarter to four. With a sigh, she snapped off the light and, dropping her head on the pillow, fell into a deep troubled sleep, dreaming she saw Roger sitting with Maxine Grahame on top of a cloud; Shirley and Betty with Major Cole, and Jim Crane in company with Cliff and Myrtle Cole adrift on a frail box, being swiftly swept out to sea, while she stood alone on a desert island, cold and afraid, gazing after them, when out from the water sprang Major Cole's sister with a huge glass of punch in one hand and a pitchfork in the other, coming menacingly towards her; and from a nearby bush she saw Oliver, in the shape of a huge white elephant, the thought running in her subconscious mind, "If Betty were here she would say I was going to have a white elephant on my hands."

CHAPTER XXII.

These were troublesome days for Molly. She knew Roger could not understand why, for the last few month, her letters had been so brief; and, to cap the climax, she had been forced to send him word postponing their wedding until April. The fact was, Molly knew much more concerning her father's business activities than did the rest of the family. She knew, too, that left to himself, utter failure would occur. Margaret was not the only one who had begged Philip to be done with the stock market. Molly had talked and pleaded with him, but to no avail. Always it was: "A little longer, Molly, child; just a few more turns at the wheel of fortune, then I'll retire, leave it completely. But, Molly, girl, keep friends with Blake in the meantime. Go out with him where he asks you, for when you don't—by jove! he's crusty. I don't dare mention stock or business in any way, shape or form when you're not just up to the mark with him, Molly. He takes it out on me. Gad, girl, I can't say I admire the man, though he has a fine business head. Wish I had half his business ability; but I don't think so highly of his disposition. Yet, he has been good to me, though I really think it's your friendship that makes him so."

"But, Dad, it isn't fair to Roger, me going out continually with Oliver; and Roger and I are to be married at Christmas, Dad—don't forget that. Then you'll have to manage Oliver alone."

"I know, I know," agreed Philip. "I'll pull out then." But the first of December Philip was not ready to pull out. He had

THE POWER OF GOLD

not been doing so well recently, for the simple reason Blake had been leaving him to shift for himself, and was so brusque and forbidding that poor Philip dared not ask him anything, let alone seek advice on the market. The cause behind this attitude lay in the fact that Molly had given notice to leave Oliver's employ, stating she was to be married before the New Year. Blake said nothing—not a word. What was in his mind, Molly couldn't fathom; but from that day on he left her father entirely on his own resources. The following week Philip lost more money than he had made in the past six months. In desperation Philip sought Molly, called her into the den one evening when Margaret had gone over to the Rosses for a while.

"What is it, Dad? What's wrong?" she asked solicitously, walking up to his desk where he sat, a bunch of papers strewn in front of him.

"Draw up a chair, Molly, and sit down here by my desk and I'll tell you what's wrong."

Molly did as he bade her, letting her hands rest on the side of the desk, where Philip was figuring on a pad.

"Jove, Molly, this is a deuce of a house to keep up. Look at all these bills; and you know how Blake has been acting? Left me to my own devices entirely and I've lost—lost heavily."

"Then why not give up, Dad? Be done with it for once and for all. This house is a great expense, and the way we have been living takes a lot of money, I'm sure. You take my advice and draw out right now."

"I can't, Molly! What would I do? How would we live? It's impossible."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Let Betty and Shirley go to work, then," Molly spoke with asperity. "Why shouldn't they? It would be much better for them, I'm certain of that!"

"Perhaps so, child, perhaps so; but they couldn't keep the whole family, not even with Cliff's help. Besides your Mother is so anxious Cliff should renew his study of law. He is to go back to his old firm the first of the New Year, you know, and I do so want to have sufficient capital to go in with Sanborn; buy a half-interest in his art store next door to Blake's office; and now it is impossible."

Molly looked thoughtful. "Couldn't you sell the house, Dad? There's no mortgage on it, is there?"

"No, but if I did sell it—cars, furniture and everything—I'd still be several thousands in the hole. Let me see." Philip drew the pad towards him, figuring quickly; then pushed it away and turned to Molly: "By jove, worse than I thought! If I parted with everything we have in the world we would still be ten thousand in debt."

"Dad!" Molly's mouth quivered. "Oh, isn't that a shame. If only you had stopped in time."

"I know, I know!" Philip was almost impatient, and went on rapidly: "That's the danger, working the market. Anyone will tell you fortunes are made overnight and lost overnight. If I could only get in Blake's good graces again and have another fly at it, we might land on our feet. What's the matter with Blake, anyway?" looking sharply at Molly. "Is he provoked at me or you?"

"At me, I expect, Dad. He has scarcely spoken to me since

THE POWER OF GOLD

I told him I was leaving. I can't understand the man. He never said a word; made no comment whatever when he heard I was to be married, and I'm sure it makes no difference to him when or whom I marry. He isn't interested in me to that extent."

"You've gone with him a lot, Molly."

"Yes," she quickly defended, "but you know it was more for your sake, Dad. The man doesn't want to marry me; don't think that. Why, he has never by word or action suggested more than casual friendship. He liked coming; liked going out with me—just a platonic friendship; but I'm afraid mine was a selfish motive—namely, so he would treat you better."

"Well, I wish you could use your influence on my behalf again, Molly. If I had just a little more time, I could manage to pull up on these losses, make a little nest-egg and quit."

"Dad," laughed Molly, shakily, "would you stop then—truly?"

"Truly, my girl; yes I would. This present state of affairs has given me an awful jolt. I'd be ready to call quits as soon as possible."

"Alright, Dad; I'm game. I'll tell Oliver in the morning that I've reconsidered my decision and will remain on for three months longer, and I'll write Roger tonight, telling him the wedding will be in the early spring—about April, I guess. That will give me a month to get ready after I leave the office. I'll do my best for your sake, Dad."

"That's the child! Do your best; you've never failed me yet," and her father leaned back in his chair, a relieved expression passing over his face.

Molly, true to her word, wrote Roger before she went to bed

THE POWER OF GOLD

that night, slipping out to post it that it might be collected in the morning. She must catch the mail, as the boat left the following afternoon; she must take no risk of missing it, or Roger wouldn't receive word of the postponement of the wedding till he arrived in Montreal. Such an occurrence was not to be thought of, so she made her letter short and to the point, though trying to let Roger understand fully that she was disappointed and hoped he would understand.

But Roger, in his little home at Selfridge Bay, knew nothing of these circumstances; had no thought but that each day was bringing him closer to Molly. Christmas would soon be here; then the long-delayed trip home to Montreal and Molly; his Molly at last, their waiting over. Oh, joy! He could scarcely wait. Would the time never come! All Roger's spare moments were spent in fixing up the little cottage, tinting the walls, hanging up a few more pictures in his endeavor to give the place a homelike atmosphere. A new rug for the living-room, a comfortable wicker rocking chair, a small writing desk—all these things had to be purchased by catalogue from Montreal and waited for with impatience. Molly must find the room comfortable and homelike.

Finally the second week in December, the refurnishing and redecorating completed. Roger looked around the spic and span little place, giving a sigh of satisfaction. Molly would like it, he was sure. He would leave the old curtains up. Chung had them all freshly washed and stiffly starched. Molly had written to say she had made new ones, hemstitched them—whatever that was—during the summer months. Lots of things she had worked for their home. Could it possibly be his and Molly's! Roger, stand-

THE POWER OF GOLD

ing in the centre of the living-room, surveyed the room and smiled in anticipation of how wonderful it would be, having Molly here with him; but even while he was thus musing, looking forward to their life together, Chung handed him a letter, which he took, looking at the handwriting lovingly, and when the Chinaman had withdrawn, he pressed the missive to his lips, then opened and read the contents.

Folding the letter mechanically, he put it in his pocket. What did Molly mean? Not to be married at Christmas; postpone the wedding till spring? Roger, his brows drawn together in a perplexed frown, walked to the window and stood gazing absently at the windowboxes Chung had nailed inside the windows, filled with brightly-hued plants. These Roger now fingered absently, absorbed with his thoughts. Why should Molly wish to postpone their marriage? Mystified, he drew the letter from his pocket, perusing its contents again; but the second reading shed no more enlightenment. The bare facts alone were there: Molly thought it best to wait till spring; could not explain satisfactorily by letter; would wait till he came down at Christmas, then he would understand, would see that she was right in her decision. She was sorry; very sorry and disappointed, too; but it couldn't be helped; they would just have to wait a while longer. Again Roger folded the letter, returning it to the envelope and put it back in his pocket. He glanced around the room. All was in readiness, but no Molly coming! He would be forced to come back alone; another three months' wait. Depressed and disheartened with this unexpected turn of affairs, Roger slumped down on the couch by the window and dropped his head in his hands.

CHAPTER XXIII.

It was the twenty-fourth of December, the day before Christmas once more. What a change in the Wainwrights' surroundings to that of the previous year—so thought each member of the family, according to their ideas, hopes and aspirations.

Margaret, as she dressed that morning in her luxuriously appointed bedroom, looked out of the side window overlooking the garden, at the stretch of smooth, white snow covering the lawn, the trees bearing down beneath the weight of snow on their branches and the icicles hanging from the roof of the side veranda on the house next door. The sight of the snow recalled to her mind that other Christmas Eve, a year ago, and of little Dorothy wrapped in blankets sitting in the packing box. With a little shiver, she turned to her mirror to arrange her hair. Then another scene came before her mental vision—of Betty and Shirley, with several young men, each of them with a wine glass in his hand, laughing and chatting, drinking at intervals and, as often as not, putting it to the lips of one and another of the girls. Cliff, too, was among them, a lighted cigarette in his fingers, but no glass. Margaret was thankful for that. Then, in quick succession came the scene of their Christmas dinner a year ago, the good time they had together around the kitchen table, the happy laughter, the close companionship. Those were happy memories. Margaret's face glowed at the remembrance. Again her eyes surveyed the lovely bedroom. She would give it all—yes—gladly, to have the loving confidence of one year ago. Neither this nor anything else in

THE POWER OF GOLD

life could make up for what she had lost. Shirley and Betty had changed—no longer caring for home life, nor their innocent pleasures as formerly. Cliff, under the none too good influence of a girl she mistrusted; Molly, preoccupied and unhappy. Only Philip, her husband, was untouched by these changed conditions. Philip was the same and she couldn't make him see the grave danger the others were in.

Philip, too, looked out on the winter scene in the garden, as he shaved by the looking glass in the immaculately clean, tiled bathroom off their bedroom. He, too, reflected on that day a year ago and smiled back at himself from the mirror with perfect contentment, perfect satisfaction—a most prosperous year, thought he, reminiscencing to himself all they had over and above last Christmas; and what a jolly good time the family were having! Yes, Philip was very content.

Molly rose and dressed quickly. This was the long-looked-for day when Roger would come. A few more hours and she would be in his arms again. Apart from this fact, her reflections of a year ago were much the same as her mother's.

Betty and Shirley wakened and sat up in bed, rang for the maid to bring them tea; then they would sleep all morning and be ready to stay awake all night again at the Christmas Eve dance to be held at the Country Club. The girls' room faced the street. The sleighs could be seen racing along rapidly, the sleighbells jingling—a true Christmas spirit was in the air. Betty, glancing out of the window, said thoughtfully: "I'd chuck the whole show, if only Milton would 'phone. Gee, I'm dying to see him again!"

Shirley remained quiet, gazing at the snow-ladened treetops.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"My word!" said Betty, "remember a year ago this morning?" and she looked at Shirley.

Shirley nodded.

"Wasn't that fierce, though?" Betty said reminiscently.

"Yes, it was," Shirley answered slowly.

"I like the times we're having now better," said Betty. "Love the gin-cons and the joy rides. Only, oh, dear, I'm lonesome for Milton. I don't suppose he will ever come back, though, so I might as well beat it off and marry Jim Crane. He wants me to."

"Oh, don't do that, Betty! It's not any harder for you than for me. I've lost Don Ellis, and I didn't intend to; but I know he disapproves of me. I often wonder if we're a pair of bats, Betty, to act as we have?"

"I expect we are, Shirley. Guess it takes a pretty strong-willed person to stand riches without losing his or her head; but we lost ours and our young men, too; so I may as well cut loose and marry Jim."

"Would you, really, Betty? Are you in earnest?"

"Oh, here's the tea. I'll tell you afterwards. Come in, Nancy," in answer to the maid's gentle tap.

"Good morning," she said brightly, as, pushing the door open wider with her foot, she came in and set the tray on the bed between the girls.

"Good morning, Nancy," they replied. "Thanks very much for bringing our tea."

"And will that be all you'll be after wantin'?" And the maid glanced from one to the other, eager to please.

"Yes, thank you, Nancy." With a smile, the maid withdrew.

THE POWER OF GOLD

When the door closed behind her, Shirley, taking a bite of toast, asked Betty:

"Did you really mean that you would actually marry Jim Crane?"

"Not as I feel this minute," and Betty stirred her tea slowly. "Not in my sober senses," she added, "but the truth is, Shirley, at night I'm not always in my sober senses. Wait till some dance is in full swing and I've had a few gin-cons and a few glasses of sherry tucked away under my bib—there's no telling what I might do! Jim has begged me to marry him on more than one occasion, and I know darned well some night I'll be too full for utterance and won't know enough to refuse him and will throw discretion to the winds and elope with him."

"Oh, you wouldn't do that, Betty?" Shirley was shocked.

"Just wouldn't I, though! You can't count on me. At least, you can't count on what those sparkling drinks do for me. I came near it one night last week. Queer what one will do when one has been imbibing too freely."

"Well, if you do, Betty, I'll straight away go ahead and marry Major Cole. He has coaxed me loads of times, too. I wouldn't care what happened to me if you went off with Jim! But, oh, Betty, I wouldn't have to be coaxed to marry Doctor Ellis, if he would ever ask me. I wish now I had gone on with my music and kept going with him. Then some day he might have asked me, and I would have been happy ever after. But now, I guess I'll have that miserable, empty sort of feeling always. I never feel really happy now, only when we're at some wild party."

Cliff slept late, without having breakfast, dressed leisurely,

THE POWER OF GOLD

thought of last Christmas, soliloquized to the effect that it wasn't so bad—they always had enough to eat, and with the memory of those other days, his mind wandered to Mildred Ross, her rather shy, gentle smile, the way she turned her head half timidly, her low musical laugh. Then, instantly, he thought of Myrtle Cole, her hard, handsome face, the way she said "damn" when her cigarette refused to light; how she impudently pursed her lips for a good-night kiss, and Cliff grinned in condonance of her actions.

Thus, each thought of the past in his and her own way; all but the children. The memory of the last Christmas was too dim a recollection to be easily recalled. Childlike, they lived in the present.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The family all out finishing the Christmas shopping, Molly sat in the den alone. She thought of the conversation that had taken place between her father and herself. She mustn't fail him now. No, she wouldn't do that; but this first evening with Roger, even if it did annoy and disappoint Oliver, she must have. It had been so long—one and a half years—and now, in a few hours, she and Roger would be together. The evening must be theirs; that was their right, whatever came. Well, she would go and dress. His boat was to arrive at five o'clock. If she dressed now she would just be in right time to meet it; but, as she rose to go her mother entered with: "Sit down a minute, Molly, I want to talk to you." And she drew a chair up to the other side of the hearth. "Listen, dear, I'm so worried about the girls. Do you know that both of them smoke?"

"Yes, Mother, I do. I was shocked; but what can you expect? This crowd is not like our old friends, the Rosses, Roes, Masons, and all that set. There is a vast difference between the two social sets, you know."

"Yes," answered her mother, "the more pity—a light-headed, frivolous bunch. The dance at the Country Club tonight is going to be pretty lively, I fear, from some things I've heard. I wish you would go. I feel safer regarding the girls when you are with them, Molly. I'm fearful for Betty mostly. She is so impulsive. Won't you go, Molly, and watch them?"

"Oh, Mother, I can't drag Roger off his first night home.

THE POWER OF GOLD

Besides, I was so sure of remaining home that when Oliver asked me to go, I said I would go with him, if I went with anyone. He would be furious, if after that I brought Roger along."

"I suppose he would, Molly, but you don't know how worried I have been about those girls. I'm not so anxious concerning Cliff; he is older and his habits formed. Only I do wish he would not keep such steady company with that Myrtle Cole. My, but she is a brazen hussy, if there ever was one—a little vixen; and the way she hangs around Cliff is sickening. Why doesn't he go with some of the other girls? Though, for that matter, they are all alike. How I wish he was still friendly with Mildred Ross."

"Their friends are not the same, Mother, and he never goes there any more, for all his time is taken up with these new friends."

"That's just it," replied her mother. "I have worried so much about Cliff and the girls! It's far harder on me than poverty ever was, and this Christmas Eve affair is going to be worse than any of the other. Do go, Molly; there's a good girl. Don't fail me. You never have. Go with Oliver Blake. Then you can watch the three of them, and my mind will be easy. Oh, dear, I cried for myself last year, we were so poor; but I knew nothing about worry as I have known it these last few months when I have watched in trepidation for fear harm would come to Cliff and the girls, and now, tonight, I have a forboding all is not right. Why I even heard Betty say—in fun, of course—that she was not at all sure where she would be for New Year's. Lots of the girls, she said, had gone off and gotten married on the sly. She might do likewise. Of course, I don't really think she would, but I have no confidence in Jim Crane or Major Cole, either. I dislike

THE POWER OF GOLD

him as I do his sister, but I would feel easy if you would phone Oliver that you would go."

"Well, Mother, I'll go with him. I'll try and make Roger see without explaining more than you would wish him to know," and she stooped to kiss her mother's cheek, then hurried upstairs to dress. But with all her hurrying, and notwithstanding the speed the chauffeur made, the boat was in when Molly arrived. She glanced hastily around the wharf, then spied Roger with his suit-cases, looking expectantly up and down the dock.

"Roger," she cried, running towards him.

"Molly, Molly!" as he strode quickly to meet her, clasping her tightly in his arms, pressing kiss after kiss on her lips, oblivious of their surroundings, seeing nothing of the hurrying crowds around them.

"Oh, it's so good to see you," he said at length, releasing her. "You haven't changed a bit."

"Why, Roger," laughed Molly, "did you think I would?"

When they were seated in the car, Roger reached over, and taking her hands in both of his, said: "Molly, darling, would you mind if I drove directly home? I know Mother expects me, and then I'll have dinner with them. They have just returned from Europe last week; been away a year; so you understand how it is, don't you, sweetheart; and I'll be right over after dinner, about eight, say; then for a good long evening together, dear. There is so much I want to ask you, Molly, and something I would like explained."

"What things explained, Roger?"

"Why, darling, about our postponed wedding, for one thing.

THE POWER OF GOLD

Oh, Molly, dearest, I was so disappointed when your letter came telling me we couldn't be married this Christmas. I want that gone into, dearest. See if we can't do something about it, even yet. There is still time and I want to take you back with me, darling, unless you really don't want to come. You see, dear, you have never told me yet why you have made such a close friend of this Blake fellow."

"You know I work for him, Roger."

"Yes, dear; but according to your own story, your Dad has not done badly; and Ellis says your new house is a wonder. The other girls, I mean Betty and Shirley, are not working, why should you?"

"Oh, you don't understand, Roger. I can't explain."

"Perhaps I don't, darling, but it isn't only that. It seems to me you spend all your leisure time with Blake, too. That's what puzzles me. It isn't enough to be with him all day, evidently. But I won't say anything about it now, honey; leave it till later. I want us to have this Christmas Eve without one shadow to mar our pleasure. I can hardly wait, much as I want to see Dad, Mother and the boys! It seems I have just been living for this Christmas Eve with you."

"Oh, Roger, don't say that—I mean I would love it, too, but—"

"But what, Molly?"

Molly spoke hastily, changing the subject: "Oh, wait, Roger. You must give your address to the chauffeur," and she lifted the speaking tube, giving the address almost eagerly, so it seemed to Roger. Was she, then, anxious to get rid of him? A jealous pang shot through him. A moment of intense silence, then: "Molly,

THE POWER OF GOLD

you'll give me this evening, won't you? You don't mean you could possibly have made another engagement, knowing I would be here?" And he took her hand again, holding it close to him and looking intently into her face. "Don't say you have, dear. I couldn't bear it; to think you care so little!"

"Roger, I do care. Don't think otherwise, please. Only there is something I just can't explain. You wouldn't understand if I did; you couldn't."

"Try me and see, dear," he murmured, bending closer and slipping his arm around her.

"No, no," she replied. "You would only say, 'Well, and what of it? This is our night, we'll have it!' But, Roger, don't you see, there are times in our lives when one's own pleasure, one's own way must be put aside for the sake of others—one's family, you know, dear Roger. There is such a thing as loyalty and duty towards one's people, and when that conflicts with our desires, you know the answer, or what the answer should be."

"I don't follow you at all, Molly. Don't understand you in the least, and can't think what possible family duty would cause you giving this, our first night, to someone else; for that is exactly what you have done, isn't it?"

"Molly, it will make it easier for you—for both of us—if you are frank with me. Tell me straight, you are going out with someone else? Isn't that it? Come now, come on, tell me."

"Well, yes, Roger, it is; but you don't know the reason."

"Then tell me," he said crisply.

"That's just it. I'll tell you part of it, Roger. The girls have been going to some rather wild parties and there was one on

THE POWER OF GOLD

tonight, and if I went—well, it would be better for them. In short, sort of—well, look after them; they need me. Now, are you satisfied?”

“No, I am not,” Roger said sternly. “Who are you going to the party with?”

“Mr. Blake.”

“Hm, Blake, eh? And you’re going out with him, our first evening together in a year and a half! I call it a very flimsy excuse, Molly, to say the least. You may let me out, here. This is near enough. I’ll walk down the block.”

“Oh, I’ll take you right to the house, Roger, of course. You have your satchels to carry, too!”

“No, no, never mind. Just stop at this corner, please. The walk will do me good, and the suitcases are not heavy. This is fine,” as the car was brought to a standstill and Roger alighted, reaching for his suitcases.

“Well, when shall I see you, Molly?” he asked tersely. “It’s entirely up to you.”

“Come to Christmas dinner tomorrow night at seven.”

“Thanks. Will Blake be there, by any chance?”

“Well, yes; I expect so,” Molly hesitantly replied.

“Then we’ll call it off,” said Roger, “the folks will want me home, I guess, anyway.”

“Well, come in after dinner, Roger. Quite a number are coming in to dance.”

“Yes? Very well, Molly, thanks; I’ll be up about nine o’clock.”

“Alright, Roger, dear; and don’t feel badly, please,” begged Molly, as she laid a hand on his arm.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"No," laughed Roger shortly, "so long as I don't feel hurt, it's alright with you. Is that it, Molly?" But before she could reply the car gave a jerk and she was off.

Molly leaned back feeling thoroughly miserable. She had never seen Roger like that before. He was usually so gentle, kind and pleasant, but tonight . . . Of course, one couldn't expect him not to be disappointed. Never mind, she would make it up to him tomorrow evening. They would be sure to have a few minutes together, anyway. How nice it was to have him back, and how wonderful he looked—so tall and handsome! What a difference between Roger and Oliver Blake! If he only knew how little she cared for Oliver! No need for Roger to feel jealous. He would see that eventually. Oh, yes, she could fix things up alright. Christmas night they would have a nice quiet talk; go off by themselves for awhile. Then she could tell him more about the things that bothered her; she could think out how much to say and yet be loyal to her family. Then, too, she would play their record—put it on the gramophone soon after he came; that would soothe his ruffled feelings.

The car slowed up on the driveway and stopped. Molly sprang out quickly and ran up the steps just as the door opened and Betty came out on her way to purchase some holly, smoking a cigarette. Though Molly was aware that her sisters had formed the habit, this was the first time she had seen one of them smoke on the street and, with a little gasp, she said:

"Betty Wainwright, you should be ashamed. You girls are getting abominable, with your smoking and drinking. Between you, you are worrying Mother to death. Surely she has had things

THE POWER OF GOLD

hard enough these last few years!" It was rarely Molly had ever spoken so to either of the girls. Betty, taking the cigarette from her mouth and staring at her, said:

"Why, Molly, what a fuss you make! You know very well all the girls in our set smoke and drink. That's nothing!"

"Nothing, Betty? Nothing that all this hurts Mother? Nothing that it is all so foreign to the teaching we have had, the high principles both Mother and Dad have tried to instill into each one of us?"

Betty tapped her foot impatiently. "Don't stand here lecturing me, Molly, please. I'm in a hurry, and besides it's cold."

"Very well," said Molly quietly, "I'll go with you, and don't think I'm lecturing you. It's not that; but I can't bear to see how you girls are changing. It's not for the better, I assure you, Betty."

"Never mind," said Betty, catching hold of her sister's arm and speaking in a lighter tone. "Here, I'll throw the cigarette away and we'll talk of something else. It's Christmas Eve, you know. We should be happy, glad and joyful to be out of all that misery of last Christmas."

"That reminds me," remarked Molly quietly. "I thought we were to do such wonders for the poor this year, Betty. Do you not recall the plans we made the summer after we all got positions?"

"Yes, and we would have, Moll, only there has been so much doing lately—dinners, dances, teas, luncheons—seems there has hardly been a day there isn't something on. How about yourself, Moll? How many families have you visited and given relief to?"

THE POWER OF GOLD

"None," answered Molly. "I only sent a cheque to a charity fund, that's all, and I intended to do so much. The fact is, Betty, Oliver has taken up so much of my time—for Dad's sake alone, I've given him my time. He and Oliver do not get along very well. Oliver has no patience with poor old Dad and his artistic proclivities. Then Dad makes so many mistakes in the office. It is all new to him, the stock market and all. For his sake I have tried to be particularly friendly with Oliver; hence the acceptance of all his invitations. That is simply all there is to it, Betty. Here we are at the florists. Get your holly and let's hurry back."

Betty, out again from the store, the box of holly under her arm, fell into her usual long, swinging stride, so characteristic of her. The night was clear and cold, a northerly wind blowing, and both girls' cheeks glowed with the crisp, frosty air.

"Isn't it a lovely night?" remarked Betty, pushing back a strand of hair which had blown across her face.

"Yes," answered Molly, "but not as cold or stormy as last Christmas Eve."

"Don't speak of it!" Betty spoke impatiently. "I want to forget last year; we had an awful time!"

"Not as bad as it might have been, Betty. We got through alright; we didn't starve."

"No," grunted Betty, "we managed somehow to keep one lap ahead of the wolf. Here we are home, and, believe me, I'm glad it's this big, beautiful home instead of that little four-roomed shack, or even the 'white bungalow,' though it wasn't so bad."

"Indeed it was not," said Molly emphatically. "We had some happy days there, Betty. Don't go in yet," she urged, as

THE POWER OF GOLD

Betty ran up the steps. "Wait a minute, I want to ask you about Milton. Do you ever see him? What is wrong between you two? Why doesn't he come here?"

"I can't tell you now, Molly. Besides, there is nothing to tell. He just doesn't like society girls and looks on me as one, I guess," laughed Betty with a harsh little ring in her voice, as she opened the door and entered the large, warm hall.

The children were romping through the rooms, while Cliff and Shirley, with their mother's help, were putting some Christmas decorations in the living-room. Their father was in the den, reading his paper by the fire.

"Well," Molly greeted them, "it's good to see this family together and alone once in a while. Come on upstairs, Betty," as Betty stood looking over the letters on the hall table and then turned with a disappointed expression. When they reached Molly's room, she stopped and laid a detaining hand on Betty's arm.

"Did you expect a letter, Betty? Did you think perhaps Milton would send you some Christmas greeting?"

"Yes, I suppose I did," laughed Betty recklessly, "but I didn't need to. He's off with someone else, I guess."

"Betty, dear, tell me all about it," asked Molly, as Betty rushed past, down the hall to her own room. Molly followed.

"Really, there's nothing to tell, Molly," as she paused at her room door. "Just that he happened to see me with a cocktail in one hand and a cigarette in the other and was no end shocked. Said he was disappointed in me; thought me of finer calibre than that; wasn't his idea of womanhood. All that bunk, and I haven't seen him since. That was two months ago, so I guess he's gone

THE POWER OF GOLD

for good. However, I should worry! Lots of nice boys in our set; Jim Crane, for instance. Lots of fun, too; not so darned straight-laced."

"Betty," Molly spoke impatiently, "that Jim Crane is drunk half his time. He never did an honest day's work in his life. Don't compare him with Milton Harwood. My, I do think you are so foolish!"

"I should worry!" repeated Betty again, with a forced laugh, as she turned the knob of her door, "having a good time, anyway."

"You think you are," murmured Molly, as she retraced her steps back to her own room. "Why do people fool themselves that way, believing that they can't be happy unless they smoke and drink and are everlastingly on the go." Her thoughts were just then interrupted by Shirley, tapping lightly on the door. Then, at Molly's "Come in," she entered with a huge box of flowers.

"Quick, Molly, let me put them down on the bed. That's right," as Molly moved some parcels to make room. "I'm so anxious to find the card to see who they're from. Oh, I do hope they're from Doctor Ellis! I hope it is—I do, I do!" and with both hands she searched through the roses for the sender's card. "Here it is at last," lifting the small card, her face falling as she read: "To dear little Shirley, with love, from the 'Major'." "Major Cole, bah! Who cares for him! Conceited old flirt."

"But he says with his love, Shirley," a look of displeasure flitting across Molly's face.

"That's alright; likely drunk when he wrote it. He says he always gets drunk Christmas Eve and New Year's."

"Yes? Shirley, if it were only twice a year! He's another who

THE POWER OF GOLD

has a distorted opinion of a wonderful time. But you got those roses, and it's Christmas Eve. It has made you happier, so—"

"Not so very," quietly remarked Shirley. "It would have if only Don Ellis had sent them, and that's who I thought they were from, Molly. Now I'm disappointed and feel worse than if they hadn't come at all!" And she sat down on the side of Molly's bed, beside the box of roses, with such a crestfallen expression that Molly put her arm around her little sister's shoulder, with: "Never mind, honey. I'm sorry; but he may send you some little remembrance yet. Christmas isn't over, you know."

"No, he won't. He has just dropped me entirely. Never comes near the house; even hurries by with but the briefest of greetings when we meet on the street."

"What is the matter with him, Shirley? He was certainly attentive enough last summer."

"That isn't now, Moll. He says I've changed and that he never did admire a girl who smoked and spent all her time just playing around having a good time."

"When did he tell you that, Shirley?" as she withdrew her arm, giving Shirley a little pat and seating herself by the dressing table, taking down her hair and brushing it, while she listened to Shirley telling how Doctor Ellis had talked to her one night. "He said," continued Shirley, "his idea of a woman was essentially a womanly woman, who could have a good time, but not content to play all the time; one who had higher aspirations than that. Then, too, he said, if he had a sister, he would not want her to smoke or drink; and certainly not his wife, if he were ever fortunate enough to have one."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Poor Shirley! I am sorry for you; but he is quite right. I feel the same way about these things and am sure all high-minded young men do also. It's such a pity; it seems both you and Betty have paid rather dearly for your so-called good times. I admire Doctor Ellis and Milton Harwood very much. Mother does, too; and I know Dad would, if he ever stopped to think of who you girls were going with, or of what either of you were doing. But he is so taken up with making money when the opportunity is his—seems to think he is making up to us for all the hard times we had before. He is so very anxious to give us everything, and I sometimes wonder if it isn't the worst we're getting instead of the best. Riches do not always bring happiness, Shirley. Often it is the ruination of people. Not everyone can stand prosperity, and I guess the Wainwrights are no exception. Run now, dear, and brush up for dinner. I must hurry and dress, for Oliver is coming at eight."

CHAPTER XXV.

Christmas night; the house crowded with guests. Molly felt much happier than the previous evening. First of all, the dance at the Country Club, while a lively party, had no disastrous effect on her two sisters, for she had watched them most carefully, much to the annoyance of Oliver and also of Jim Crane, whom she twice caught coaxing Betty to go for a drive after two a.m. The second time she saw them hurry out a side entrance and run along the walk and out to the car; Jim, with his arm around Betty, urging her along. Molly flew after them, not even waiting to put on her cloak, though it was snowing heavily, and her feet were wet before she reached the driveway, her bare shoulders covered with sleet and snow; but she paid no attention to any bodily discomfort. She must not let them get away. Twice she noticed Betty pause, turn and start to run back, but each time Jim caught her and kissed her. Molly noticed the girl was warmly wrapped, her fur coat buttoned up to the chin, as for a long drive. Just as he was about to lift Betty into the car, Molly caught up to them, breathless.

"You are not going driving now," she gasped. "You can't, Betty! What are you thinking of?"

Humiliated and surprised by the unexpected appearance of her sister, Betty said nothing. Molly instantly took her by the arm, prevailing on her to return to the Club House.

She hadn't been sure whether Betty was relieved or vexed at her for interfering. Jim Crane showed his chagrin openly, acting

THE POWER OF GOLD

sullen and silent on the way back to the Club House, which, though only a hundred feet, seemed to Molly, walking in her high-heeled slippers in the slippery snow, to be an endless distance. For the remainder of the evening Molly kept close to Betty till it was time to go home, her mind relieved when she saw Shirley and the Major get into Jim's car with them, the four having gone to the dance together. Betty, she thought, acted very quiet and subdued, therefore, she was more than surprised when she was undressing for bed to have Betty run in, in her kimona, and throw her arms around her neck, hugging and kissing her, and between each kiss saying: "Oh, Molly, you best of all sisters! I'm more glad than I can tell that you were at the dance tonight; and, oh, Molly, I'm so glad, so thankful, you didn't let me go for the drive with Jim tonight." And leaving Molly mystified and staring after her, she ran out of the room as quickly as she had run in.

"Well," murmured Molly to herself, once more alone, "evidently Betty isn't annoyed with me, anyway."

Betty was far from being annoyed, and at that moment she was snuggling down beside Shirley, who had turned out the light and was fast asleep. Betty breathed a sigh of utter relief and gratitude as she reflected in this wise: "I'm so glad to be here with Shirley, safe at home with my own kith and kin, instead of where I would have been but for the timely interference of Molly, good sister that she is. She saved me from marrying that chap, just in the nick of time. I'll never be tempted again. He'll never be able to influence me like that again. I shake when I think of it." All this, Molly didn't know, and perhaps it was just as well.

Then something else made Molly happy. Christmas morning

THE POWER OF GOLD

she received a lovely string of pearls, with Roger's card, wishing her a "Merry Christmas." There was no other greeting, but when she called him up by phone to thank him for his gift, he admitted probably he had been too hasty the day before and would certainly be up to their dance in the evening and hoped she would give him a few minutes alone. This Molly gladly promised to do, a joyful thrill sweeping over her to find herself once more in Roger's good graces. And now the dance was in full swing, and she was waiting for him to arrive.

Shirley, Betty, Major Cole and Jim Crane, with Maxine Grahame, Myrtle Cole and a group of others, crowded the sun-room, around a table on which stood the punch bowl. Margaret had made the punch herself so as to be sure no liquor was used. The girls smiled and winked at each other, knowing full well that each boy would have his flask along. It mattered little who made the punch. Their mother had never, on any occasion, served even light wines in her home, and most strenuously objected to what the girls called "doctoring" the punch. But she soon perceived that despite her careful preparation, the punch was certainly "doctored" tonight. Already she had counted four flasks being emptied into it. The last person to add his share was Jim Crane, and when Margaret hastened to his side, requesting him kindly, but firmly, to desist, she was merely met with a good-natured grin and: "Oh, come now, Mrs. Wainwright; a little stick in the punch isn't going to hurt anyone," and she knew her request was fruitless. Perturbed by her defeat, she walked back to the stair landing, where she stood looking on the merry throng. The scene was certainly a gay one, the dancers revelling in joyous mirth, the

THE POWER OF GOLD

music splendid, the orchestra, like the guests, in excellent spirits—or possibly the excellent spirits were in them.

Margaret remained on the landing for some time watching, as best she might, to keep tab on affairs. Particularly did her eyes focus on the sunroom, for around that punchbowl her fears centered. Finally one after the other left till Cliff alone remained, waiting for his partner, Myrtle. Of all the girls, it was she who lingered the longest at the punchbowl, and the first to return to its lure. Much as Margaret deplored such unrestricted indulgence in this young lady, nevertheless, it gave her deep satisfaction and profound gratitude to observe that Cliff seemed in no way tempted. Intoxicating beverages evidently had no appeal to him. Seeing him thus, standing indifferently watching with amusement the dancers in the hall brought great assurance to his mother. This dear son was safe, anyway; but in a moment, to her horror and amazement, she beheld Myrtle take up one of the glasses, fill it with punch and bring it to where Cliff was standing by the door, and with a bewitching smile, take a sip herself, then hold the glass up to Cliff's lips. Laughingly, he shook his head. Myrtle pouted, said something more; they both laughed. Then she put the glass to his lips again. This time he tasted it, looking at Myrtle, who was gazing at him lovingly, yet tauntingly, as she pressed it again to his lips, tipping it up, laughing uproariously. Cliff's hand reached out, encircled Myrtle's, whose fingers twined around the frail stem of the glass and, in a second more he had drained the contents, placed his arm around Myrtle's waist and joined the dancers.

Margaret gasped, gave a little cry; but no one heard her.

THE POWER OF GOLD

Blindly she made her way up the few remaining stairs and on to her room. Throwing herself on the bed, she sobbed as though her heart would break. Never had she felt so sad, distressed, completely downcast. Last year was nothing compared with tonight. Last Christmas she had her children, fine minded, sober, industrious, ready to take their places in the world and endeavor to do their part in the serving of mankind, towards the uplifting of humanity, not its degradation; and now—this! Her hopes, her aspirations for these dear ones were laid low, trampled in the dust of despair.

At last she rose, dried her eyes and sank into the little wicker rocker by her window, looking out at the night. It was snowing almost as hard as last Christmas night, the memory of which filled her with an uncontrollable longing. Could she but retrace her steps—go back to one year ago—how happy she would be! How could these dear children go on like this, with never a thought other than this empty, frivolous life? What lay in the future for them? No, no; she didn't dare look into the future. She felt so helpless, so powerless to stem the tide of the seeming inevitable consequences.

Her thoughts turned to Molly. Molly was the same; had not been adversely affected by this different mode of living, unless her friendship with Oliver Blake was winning her slowly, but surely away from Roger. Poor Roger; he was such a dear! How often she had remarked that Roger seemed already one of them, and how worthy of her Molly, dear, affectionate girl. Whatever was Molly thinking of? So unlike her to become influenced with money as to even contemplate giving up a man like Roger. Molly

THE POWER OF GOLD

must surely have meditated something of the sort, or why so constantly with Oliver? Oh, if Philip had only been content without reaching out for affluence, all this might have been averted. If he had realized the power of gold—for good or evil!

But she must go down now. Time to see about supper. She would be needed. Bathe her face; put the worry away for now. She would talk to Cliff; must not take his action too seriously. He might never take another drop. She would certainly use her influence; do her utmost to prevent a recurrence. Alas, poor Margaret! Never take another drop! How often do any of them stop at the first glass?

Meanwhile, in the conservatory, Roger was waiting, pacing up and down, taking his watch out, looking at it, putting it back. Would Molly never come? Except for a moment's greeting when he arrived, she had not given him one minute. He had noticed her talking with Betty and Shirley from time to time and saw her go to Cliff, who was continually making little excursions to the punchbowl in the sunroom. Cliff was already to the stage where a few more glasses and he would certainly be "well away."

Roger concluded Molly needed to keep an eye on Cliff. Didn't know Cliff drank; thought him such a fine, clean chap. And those girls, Shirley and Betty—why, they were regular little toppers, and smoking like chimneys, too! Here was Molly at last, and at the sight of the slight girlish figure advancing towards him, her sweet face aglow, all his impatience vanished. His girl—his Molly! Jove, it was worth coming five hundred miles just to see her, have one look at her; and as she came close to him he reached out to take her hands, but—

THE POWER OF GOLD

"No, Roger, not yet. In another ten minutes I'll come. I must go and speak to Cliff. I can't wait; no, truly, I can't."

"Molly," said Roger, thoroughly disappointed, "tell me what's the matter? Things seem changed; you're changed, too. Tell me what it is. I'll bear it, stand up to it—only tell me. Don't keep me in the dark, that's all."

"I've just now decided to be perfectly candid, Roger; the better way—and I intend to tell you the whole truth. No reason why you should be kept in the dark. I'll come and tell you everything just as soon as I speak to Cliff."

With that, some of the dancers jerked against them and in a moment they were separated. Molly went in search of Cliff, while Roger, with lagging steps, walked back to the conservatory. What was Molly going to tell him? She had looked grave when she said that last about his having a right to know. Of course, it couldn't be that she had changed her mind! Molly wasn't that kind of a girl. Then Blake! Oh, no, some of these chaps might appeal to Molly; some were dashing, handsome fellows; but Blake . . . Yet, Blake was a millionaire. Oh, rot! Roger shook himself impatiently. The idea, to even think of such a thing about Molly.

Molly, as she turned away, compressed her lips tightly, her mind definitely made up. No more subterfuges, no more covering things up. "Roger is to be my husband," she reasoned. "It is not being disloyal to my family to explain how things are, how worried I am about the girls and Cliff. If Mother knew about Cliff her heart would break. But Cliff gets no more of that stuff, for I'll dump it all out the window. Everyone has had too much. They're all, to use Myrtle's vulgar expression, 'soused.'

THE POWER OF GOLD

And there is Dad over there talking stocks and bonds to Oliver, oblivious to it all. Thinks he is giving his children a good time. Poor old Dad."

Where in the world was Cliff? Molly could see nothing of him nor of Myrtle either. Well, they were not at the punchbowl anyway; that was one comfort. Watching her chance, Molly slipped into the sunroom and, hastily closing the French doors, ran to one of the side windows, jerked it open, grabbed up the punchbowl and emptied the contents on the lawn, replaced the bowl on the table, opened the doors again and walked into the living-room, where, at last, she saw Cliff in a heated controversy with another of Myrtle's admirers, while Myrtle stood by, laughing.

It was with difficulty that Molly succeeded in quieting Cliff, persuading him to finish the dance with her instead of Myrtle, who, desiring to add fuel to the fire, had given the remainder of the dance to someone else. Molly, finding that her ten minutes had lengthened to nearly half an hour, hastened to the hall, gave a signal to the orchestra to play "The West, a Nest and You," then started through the living-room and thence on to the conservatory, at last to have her long-deferred reunion with Roger. But scarcely had she entered the living-room, the strains of the music falling softly on the air, the sweet notes of their piece appealing to her forcibly, than Oliver came forward and claimed the dance. She tried to tell him it was already promised to Roger, but Oliver only laughed and held her the firmer.

"Why doesn't he come for you, then?" he cried boisterously. He, too, had been indulging too freely and treated this as a huge joke, keeping her, whether she wanted to dance with him or not.

THE POWER OF GOLD

Molly looked frantically toward the conservatory. There stood Roger watching them, his face set and white. She tried to smile reassuringly, but Roger misinterpreted her meaning, and with one surprised, anguished look, a look that sent a pang of distress through Molly, a look that haunted her in the days to come, he turned abruptly, walking quickly to a door at the end of the conservatory leading to a side hall. Vainly did she try to prevail on Oliver, begging him to let her go, his only response to her plea being to hold her closer, swinging into the dance with abandon, singing the while loudly, "The West, a Nest and You," in his coarse deep voice. Cole called out to him:

"Atta boy, Olie, old chap; treat 'em rough; cave man stuff."

Cole was another who had imbibed to excess.

The dance over, Molly jerked away angrily, her eyes brimming with tears. She sped through the hall to the veranda, down the steps and out the front gate, peering up and down the street; but Roger was not anywhere to be seen. It was snowing heavily and the street was deserted. Retracing her steps, she walked down the veranda which ran around the house to a door in the side hall, made her way to the rear stairs and on up to her room, bitterly disappointed; her carefully made plans completely upset. Dejectedly, she threw herself on the bed in a flood of tears, overcome by this distressing condition of affairs.

Here it was Christmas night! Roger home after all the months of patient waiting. Oh, it was too hard—too hard! The strain of the whole evening had been great; but to have it end so deplorably caused her extreme sadness. But, like her mother, she knew she would be needed downstairs. So, dragging herself up

THE POWER OF GOLD

wearily, she washed all traces of tears away. Just as she was brushing her rumpled hair, Shirley hastily rapped at the door, turning the knob. Finding the door locked, she whispered anxiously:

"Molly, come on down; the guests are going. They're asking for you."

CHAPTER XXVI.

The following day Molly waited in vain for Roger. Nor did he even phone her, though his mother informed him that Molly had phoned several times during the morning while he was in town; but Roger refused to ring her up, saying to his mother, as he settled himself with a book in front of the living-room fire: "No, Mother, don't ask me to phone Molly again. If she has anything to tell me, let her write. As for me, I'm through, and I tell you what, Mother, I would not have believed Molly could treat me so."

Mrs. Holmes was seated in her favorite rocker, close to her son, and as Roger was speaking, she drew her work basket towards her. She was a small woman, with snow-white hair, a pale, delicate face, lit with a sweet, pleasant expression, with usually a smile for everyone. But there was no smile on her face this afternoon. She looked worried and perplexed, and after several attempts to work at a centrepiece she was embroidering, she finally folded it neatly and placed it on top of her basket. Then, turning to her son, who had abruptly dropped the subject of Molly, resuming his reading, she began: "Roger, I particularly want to hear about your trouble with Molly. I will tell you why afterwards."

"There is not much to tell, Mother," answered Roger, looking up from the open book in his hand. "As I told you before, it just appeared to me as though she had decided in favor of the other chap. She has been receiving a great deal of attention from him for nearly a year now, and this, apparently, is the ultimate culmin-

THE POWER OF GOLD

ation of that friendship. I suppose it was rather hard for her to tell me, so evidently that's why she had our piece played, and immediately looked over to me and danced it with him. The whole thing was significant of the fact that he had taken my place. It seems to me a crude way for a girl to do. I can't understand Molly resorting to such a method. Why couldn't she have come to me—told me plainly? But to adopt such a course as to have the orchestra play that piece, for I saw her speaking to them—she deliberately asked them to play it, and then looked over to me, I suppose to be sure I saw her. It was all so obvious. I can't understand Molly at all."

Mrs. Holmes looked grave during this recital, but said nothing, and Roger, after a slight pause, continued: "Another thing I can't understand her doing is this: I happened into a second-hand store this morning when I went into town. I saw a Chinese idol in the window—thought I would take it home to that cook of mine, Chung. When the clerk was wrapping it up I strolled around, looking at some odds and ends in a showcase. Mother, I could hardly believe my eyes; but there, lying in that showcase was the peculiarly shaped bracelet I had given Molly a year ago—my Christmas gift to her!"

"Oh, no, Roger; surely not!" exclaimed his mother indignantly.

"Yes, it was. I had the man take it out for me, so I could examine it more closely. There were our initials just as I had had them engraved on the inside. Now, can you conceive of a girl doing a thing like that; least of all, Molly, with her lovely, sweet character? Why, I could never imagine Molly pawning a gift, and especially mine."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"No, I can't either," said his mother gravely; "but she really does care for you, I am sure of it!"

"Then why, in the name of common sense, is she acting this way?" angrily demanded Roger. "Why throw me over for Oliver Blake? Why sell my gift?"

"I can answer that, my son," his mother spoke quietly. "I'm terribly grieved about it all, Roger," and she took out her handkerchief and began to cry softly. "I want to tell you, but you will be terribly angry and hurt, too."

"Here, here, Mother, dear, don't cry—don't, please!" begged Roger, leaning over and putting his arm around her shoulders. "Forget it. No doubt it's my own fault somehow."

"No, no, it isn't, Roger. Oh, I do feel so badly, and I want to be loyal to your father, too! Yet I feel you have a right to know."

"Tell me then, Mother; there's a dear."

"Well, it's like this: You know Molly's father bought a lot of worthless stock and it made them frightfully poor."

"Yes, yes; I knew that; but go on."

"Well, it was your father who sold it to him."

"Father?" cried Roger, incredulously. "You don't mean to say he tried to palm worthless stock off on Mr. Wainwright, do you?"

"Yes, Roger; and haven't I always been cautioning him not to sell to anyone stock that he wouldn't buy himself! But at times he has. I've deplored the fact very much, as you know; but he always puts me off with some excuse, some subterfuge. Now it comes home to us with a vengeance—reflected on his own family.

THE POWER OF GOLD

Molly's actions are as plain as day, or at least what prompted them. Did you see Mr. and Mrs. Wainwright last night, Roger? How did they seem?"

"Oh, I was merely speaking to them. Mr. Wainwright was with Oliver Blake a great part of the time, and I could see he was very anxious to keep in with him, though I've a notion Blake simply tolerates Wainwright. And when I come to think of it, Mrs. Wainwright, though pleasant, seemed very much preoccupied. Perhaps they thought I might try to influence Molly in my favor. However, they don't need to fear me queering things for Molly. I'll see Dad; tell him what I think of him; then I'll pack and leave on the ten o'clock boat tonight," and walking over to the book-case, he replaced the book he had been reading and left the room, while his mother sat staring into the fire. Presently the door opened and her husband, in great agitation, entered.

"What is all this, Mabel? Roger is furious with me. What about Molly's father and the stock? What stock? Roger says I sold it to him," and he stood by his wife's chair, his eyes gleaming with anger.

Mrs. Holmes rose quietly and faced her husband. "It's this, Jim. All these years you have repeatedly foisted stock that didn't come up to par, or that you were afraid was not advancing as was expected. You have been foisting, I say, that stock on other unsuspecting buyers, and you didn't tell all you knew about it or they would never have bought it."

"Don't talk as though I were a crook, Mabel." Mr. Holmes was indignant. "You speak as though I deliberately swindled them. If they were foolish enough to buy—why—"

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Yes, yes; I know that old argument, Jim. You had the stock to sell—bona fide stock. Oh, I know you've kept within the law and all that, but you know as well as I do that what I say is true. When stock ceased to be saleable you invariably unloaded it on some poor, unsuspecting man."

"What if I did?" defended her husband. "Where is all this leading up to? I had my family to think of, hadn't I? The boys to educate; Roger, especially? I always had that boy's interests so much at heart. You know I have! And for him to talk to me the way he did. I never even saw Molly's father. We've been away so much since they were engaged and the time you invited her people over, Mr. Wainwright couldn't come. We had Molly here a few times, but I've never yet met her father, so how could I sell him stock when I didn't even know the man?" Mr. Holmes paced up and down the room in a fit of vigorous agitation.

"Just a minute, just a minute, Jim," began his wife. "You remember that stock you had from British Columbia? You thought at first it was going to turn out so well, then something went wrong—I don't know what? It matters not. Suffice it to say that when things fell flat you sold all your holdings in it to an Englishman by the name of Wainwright for two thousand dollars cash. I remonstrated with you at the time. I thought it such a shame—a man, new in the country, who was not likely so well versed about such things as you."

"Yes, Mabel, you don't need to enlarge on it. I recall it now."

"Well, Jim, that was Molly's father. Molly told me all about it one day she was here for luncheon, but at that time she didn't know it was you who had sold it. However, it made me uneasy,

THE POWER OF GOLD

so after she had gone home I looked up the name in the book you gave me of the amount of stock you had sold that year. The circumstances seemed similar, but I wanted to know for sure; and there it was: Philip Wainwright, and his phone number he had given you to ring him up about it—as though you ever would! But you put it down just the same, and I recognized it at once as the one Roger used to ring when he was phoning Molly. And now apparently they have found out it was you who sold them the stock and Molly has broken with Roger, no doubt on that account.”

“What?” ejaculated Mr. Holmes. “Broken her engagement?”

“Well, practically so, though I believe she still thinks a great deal of Roger. But you did what they would consider a dishonorable deed. In fact, from the impression I have of Mr. Wainwright, he is the calibre of man who would view your action as dishonest, and—well—Roger is your son; what could you expect? As Molly said that day, in speaking of her father’s investment (of course, she hadn’t the slightest idea then that you had sold it), she didn’t see how any man could do such a dishonorable thing, and she put honor and integrity before everything else.”

At this Mr. Holmes slumped into the chair Roger had vacated and buried his face in his hands, while his wife, softened by the sight of her husband’s visible contrition, laid a kindly hand on his shoulder. She knew how deeply he would regret the past, for he dearly loved Roger; and it was the knowledge that he had discredited himself in his son’s estimation which caused him such anguish now, but now proved to be too late, for Roger left that night as he had planned.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Christmas holidays over, things settled down to the usual routine. Molly worked harder than ever. Not that she was particularly required to, for Oliver made her work easy at all times. She worked from choice; wanted to forget—forget how Roger had left without a word. She had cried herself to sleep on Christmas night, realizing only too well how things looked when Oliver had whisked her off in that dance, and to the sweet rhythm of “their” piece—her’s and Roger’s; of how white Roger had looked, standing there watching them from the conservatory. It was all too awful! And then, after leaving her phone number so often the following day, no response from him. Then the following morning she had rung up his mother, only to find he had left without so much as good-bye. Mrs. Holmes had spoken, too, as though it was all so final. What did she mean by saying that Roger realized things could not be otherwise. It was too bad. She was sorry—had looked forward to Molly being her daughter-in-law and had felt very badly indeed when Roger had told her his decision to leave at once.

Molly could not understand. Was it just his pride that was hurt and he was angry of it? Whatever it was, his affection couldn’t be so deep, to leave like that—not even try to see her again! Oh, well, she had done her part; the next move must be his. Surely he wouldn’t leave her long in suspense. He would write before long, she felt sure, and when he did she would explain everything.

THE POWER OF GOLD

But as week after week went by without a word or a line from him, Molly grew restless, unstrung. Never had she been so irritable with the girls. Their incessant smoking tried her patience sorely, and the everlasting round of gaiety she viewed with contempt. It all tended to exasperate her. The girls were wasting their time. Bluntly she told them so. Told them what useless lives they were leading; and, in turn, Betty and Sherey were irritable with Molly, for they also were on edge, and, if the truth were known, neither one of them was happy.

Their mother, also, was far from happy. Many a night she cried herself to sleep. She was worried about the girls, true enough; but Cliff, her splendid son, caused her far greater anxiety, for Cliff was certainly going the pace. Three and four o'clock every morning now, sometimes later, before he came in; then none too steady. Sometimes it was all he could do to get into bed himself, where he slept heavily until noon the next day. His firm had not stood for such hours, nor had they condoned the bleary-eyed appearance when he arrived, unfitted for the day's work. They simply let him out; not the class of man wanted. Little it mattered to Cliff, this dismissal. He had money enough. Why work if he didn't have to? Cliff, like many another young man who holds the opinion that he can drink or let it alone, had found himself in bondage to this degrading monster; found himself drifting and fast losing the desire or inclination to endeavor to stem the tide.

Vainly did Margaret remonstrate with his father not to give him an allowance, but Philip would say: "Why sure, give the boy some spending money. Hasn't he worked hard and faithfully

THE POWER OF GOLD

when we were poor? Well, then, give him a rest now. By and by he will take up law. We must not hurry the lad. Let him have a good time; we can afford it. Give him a fine allowance, too! Why not?"

While she got her husband's viewpoint, still, knowing as she did of the danger Cliff was in, it worried Margaret sorely; yet she could not tell her husband that their son was drinking—wasting the money, had no idea of returning to his profession. How could she worry Philip with such a recital of woe. No, she would talk again to Cliff. She had done so before, but with little success. She would try again—appeal to his better nature, warn him where all this might lead, point out the danger signals.

And she did, but to no avail. Cliff was dazed more than half the time, the other half was spent with Myrtle or Jim Crane. Even the children noticed the difference in him. Poor little Ronald fretted greatly. Something, he felt sure, had happened to his brother—his dear big brother—whom he loved so much. The child would sit at his easel painting pictures of the old home in England from memory, and then show them to Cliff to see if he wouldn't be interested; but it had no effect, for Cliff would either be sleeping heavily on the couch or going out, and always with a cigarette in his mouth, until Ronald was unable to keep these worries to himself any longer.

He said to Molly one day, as she stood by the window in the breakfast room, where he worked on a picture of the garden: "Molly, don't you think Cliff smokes too much? A long time ago he didn't smoke at all. He used to tell me it wasn't good for people to smoke."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"I know," answered Molly, patting the brown head. "But why do you think of such things, Ron?"

Ronald laid down his brush and turned his great solemn eyes on his sister:

"I always think of Cliff, now, Molly, whether I'm painting or doing my lessons or anything; even sometimes when I'm playing. I seem to see him walking along with a cigarette in his mouth. He seems so changed now, Molly; not like Cliff. He doesn't look the same. His face is all red and his eyes look bloodshot, like as if he had cold in them. I was going to ask Mummy, but she is always so busy, and then I think she cries sometimes. I've seen her when she didn't know I was looking."

"Don't say anything like that to Mummy, dear; it would worry her."

"I know, Molly; that's what I thought. And, Molly I was thinking perhaps it was because he isn't working. I suppose, though, it isn't nearly as bad as if he got drunk like that young man I saw a year ago sitting on the sidewalk."

"Oh, don't think about it, darling," gasped Molly, a little shiver running through her; and quickly she bent down and kissed the little upturned face. "Don't talk about it, Ronny, dear. Just go on with your painting and be a happy little boy—our little treasure child. Don't bother your head about any of us," and she kissed him once more.

"But, oh, Molly!" he said, putting his thin little hands up to her face, "I do so want you all to be happy, and somehow I feel that nobody is; not just as happy as we used to be before we came here to live."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"I know, dear boy. I have sometimes thought the same thing; but perhaps some day—oh—I don't know, Ronny, I'm all in a muddle myself."

Just then the maid entered to set the children's supper table, for they ate in the breakfast room each night now, as dinner was served in the dining-room at seven-thirty, and more often than not there were guests, friends of the girls' or Cliff's. Frequently Oliver would accompany Molly from the office and remain to dinner; but seldom, very seldom, were they alone.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Molly was so agitated by the actions of Cliff and the girls that she quite overlooked the fact that things were not going so well with her father and Oliver, till one day, sitting at her desk in Oliver's private office, she heard voices raised in angry dispute in the adjoining office. "Dad and Oliver again," murmured Molly. "My, what a time I have keeping those two apart. Oliver is so impatient with poor old Dad. I wonder what mistake he has made now. Nothing that I can't smooth out, I suppose," and she turned her attention again to the page she was typing. In a moment the door flew open and Oliver entered with a stride, his face like a thunder-cloud.

"What is it, Oliver? What is the matter?" as he continued to scowl.

"Matter enough," he muttered savagely. "Here I told your father to buy wheat at six and a half, it's sure to rise; and not barley, though we bought last week and made a slight profit on account of present fluctuating prices. But I decided to lay off for a while and confine ourselves entirely to wheat. I explained to your father explicitly, but he was too darned occupied in the Art Exhibit of Sanborn's next door, where he spends most of his time. Couldn't remember what I said and bought barley, with the result that he is completely wiped out."

"Wiped out?" cried Molly, jumping to her feet. "Father—why—you don't mean to say he has lost out entirely? How much? What did he put in?"

THE POWER OF GOLD

"He put in all he had and borrowed thirty thousand from me. At least I offered it to him so he could make a clean-up. Did it out of kindness, and now he loses my money as well as his own."

"You mean to say we are bankrupt?"

"That's about it, Molly."

"Oh, poor Father!" gasped Molly. "He will be heartbroken. Where is he? I must go to him?"

"He's gone home," brusquely answered Oliver. "And look here, Molly," he said in the same brusque tone, putting his hands in his pockets as he always did, thought Molly, when he was negotiating a deal. "Look here," he repeated, coming closer to her, "there is just one way you can save him."

"How, how?" frantically cried Molly, "Tell me, quick!" and she clasped her hands to her throat with a little gasp.

"By marrying me," announced Oliver, bluntly, with a look of self-assurance, while his thoughts were very much like this:

"Well, I've got you cornered at last, my girl. I knew it would come. I've played my cards and I've played safe. He lost. I knew he would. I planned it. Generally get what I want when I set out for it. Drivelling old ass! I've made him think I said wheat. Got him so muddled—but what I really did say was barley—only he doesn't know that. Neither does Molly, standing here frightened out of her wits, ready to do anything to save him. No one knows I said barley but myself, and that knowledge is safe with me. I'll tell Molly what she can do to save him, sure enough."

All these thoughts chased rapidly through Oliver's mind as he stood looking down at the fear-stricken girl. Finally he said in slow, measured tones: "Yes, Molly, you can save him by marrying me. I'll come good for the ninety thousand odd he has

THE POWER OF GOLD

lost; or at least part of it—enough so he can go on speculating. I'll see that he doesn't make another mistake. I'll watch things closely. Now, what do you say?" and he took his hands from his pockets and placed them on her shoulders, but she only gazed bewilderedly into his face. "Not everyone would make such an offer, Molly, my girl," he continued.

"Oh, oh!" she said with a sob, as she hid her face in her hands, "you know, Oliver, how much I think of Roger."

"Never mind that, Molly; just leave Roger out of this," Oliver spoke gruffly. "Why, you saw nothing of him at Christmas. He only stayed a day. Furthermore, his letters—they always used to come to the office, but they haven't come lately. You haven't heard from him since Christmas. Come now, have you?"

"Well, no," reluctantly admitted Molly, "but I've thought some day I would write. We had a little misunderstanding, and I haven't written. I was provoked with him for being so hasty about something, but I intend sooner or later to write. Oh, no, Oliver, I couldn't marry you; really, I couldn't."

Oliver took his hands from her shoulders. "Then your father is a ruined man, and I'll be forced to collect what he owes me tomorrow."

"Oh, no, Oliver, not that! Do save him! Try to help him for my sake. Please, please!" begged Molly.

"I'll tell you what, then; better not answer me now. Go home, see your father. I'll tell you frankly, he's pretty well broken up. See him, talk to him—then sleep on it and give me my answer in the morning. How's that?"

"Yes, I guess so. Perhaps I'd better do that." And Oliver,

THE POWER OF GOLD

like a man who feels sure of winning, caught her in his arms and, with an exultant laugh, drew her to him as he bent and pressed his lips ardently on hers. "Guess I know what the answer will be in the morning, eh, my darling? We'll be happy together, never fear—go for long trips, live in affluence. You'll soon forget your troubles, Roger included."

With a nervous little laugh, Molly freed herself and made for the door, saying as she went:

"In the morning, then, Oliver, I will give you my answer; but don't be too hopeful," and with that she was gone.

Getting her hat and coat, she hurried into the street, where the wind was blowing a heavy March gale. Her cheeks burned despite the cold. Marry that man? She couldn't! She knew right now how impossible that would be. With the pressure of his lips fresh in her mind—how she would loathe being kissed by him, feel his arms around her. She shuddered. Get out of it some way—talk to Dad, then sleep over it; that was good advice, alright. She hurried on, scarcely conscious of the wind swirling about her. Reaching home, she drew off her wraps in the hall and hung them away in the cloakroom off the small side hall near the den. She would go in the den now. The door was closed. Most likely poor Dad was in there lamenting his misfortune. He must be comforted; but she wouldn't marry Oliver—no, not if the whole family had to live in a tent. Mother would never ask it of her; not one of them would, so that was final. There was the paper being thrown up on the side veranda. She would go out and get it, bring it in to her father—take his attention, cheer him up—and opening the side door, Molly tiptoed on to the veranda. The paper was

THE POWER OF GOLD

lying over by the den window, where the snow had drifted up almost to the window sill. Molly picked her steps carefully to where it lay, covered in snow, and as she reached for it she glanced towards the window. The blind was up, and within sat her father at his desk with—what in the world was that in his hand? A revolver! No; oh, surely not! But yes, it was; he was pointing it to his head and reading over something he had written on a slip of paper.

With an anguished cry, she dropped the paper, ran noiselessly in, her feet scarcely touching the floor as she flew to the den door, with the thought ringing through her brain: If the door's locked, oh, if it's locked! Her hand on the knob, it turned, the door opened! What unspeakable relief. Then, trembling from head to foot and pretending not to see the thing her father hastily shoved in a drawer as he grasped the written note at the same time, Molly walked towards him, forcing herself to laugh gaily, bringing to her aid all the willpower she possessed. "Dad, you old dear, I have something so important to tell you," and she crossed the room and perched on the arm of his chair, while her lips pressed gently the grey hair. "You know," she continued, still with forced gaiety, though shaking in every nerve of her body, and with difficulty steadying her voice, "I'm going to marry Oliver Blake."

"Blake—what! Marry Oliver Blake?" Her father was immediately alert. "Why, I thought it was Roger?"

"Oh, no, Dad; that's all past. Oliver is more suitable; has more money." Then with a little laugh, "Guess I'm tired of being poor."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Hm," replied her father, "that's just what I am, too, Molly. Don't blame you much feeling that way about it. Did Blake tell you of the awful blunder I made today?"

"Yes," laughed Molly, "but don't let that worry you. Oliver told me he would fix it up alright."

"Did he, Molly? Are you sure, child?" And Philip got up from his chair and stood before her. "Do you mean that I won't lose everything?" he said, peering into her face anxiously.

"That's just what I do, Daddy," answering his question in an off-hand manner. "In fact, you won't lose anything.

"I presume he is doing it for my sake. Nevertheless, you have nothing to worry about, for he told me before I left the office that he would fix things up for you; so sit down, Dad, you're shaking like a leaf," and she gently pushed him back in his chair and sat down close to him herself.

"I do feel shaky," he said, letting his hands fall limp on the desk. "I was pretty near the end of my tether, Molly; pretty near! I felt I couldn't bear to see your mother brought down to poverty again. I just couldn't bear it, she has put up with so much."

"I understand, Dad; I know how you feel," and Molly stroked her father's hand, giving it affectionate little pats and looking up with a smile. "Well, you won't be left stranded with a million-aire son-in-law, anyway."

"No, I suppose not." Then putting his hand on her arm, looked into her face. "Are you sure you'll be happy with him, Molly, my girl? He's a hard man; terribly impatient and bent on his own way—always. Not like Roger—not at all—yet he

THE POWER OF GOLD

must be good at heart or he wouldn't do all this for me. Yes, I guess he must have a big, generous heart after all, Molly."

"Of course, Dad, he hasn't the bright, happy disposition Roger has; but, as you say, perhaps he is generous at heart. I mean—that is—he must be—I mean he is. But, Daddy, dear, tell me how on earth you made such a mistake about the stock."

"That I can't tell, Molly. I wrote it down as soon as he left, just a minute after he told me. I wrote barley and would have staked all I owned that was right. But evidently it wasn't."

"Never mind, Daddy, dear, don't think anything more about it," and she bent again to press a kiss on his forehead.

Philip patted her shoulder, saying: "You do love your old Dad, don't you, Molly?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" murmured Molly, kissing him again and again. "You'll never know how much, Daddy." With that, she hurried from the room to hide the fast-falling tears, and fled to her room, there to lie weeping on her bed.

She had burned her bridges now; irrevocably crossed the Rubicon. Yet, what else could she do? Oh, if Cliff were only as he used to be! He might help her—suggest some other way. But now things had to take their course.

From the distant living-room came the sound of music. She listened intently. It was "their" piece, "The West, a Nest and You," and with shaking sobs, she buried her face in the pillow.

* * * * *

The next morning Oliver got his answer in the affirmative, as he expected; and, furthermore, much to Molly's dismay, insisted

THE POWER OF GOLD

on an early marriage. Also, as his future wife, he did not want her to continue in his employ. Stay home—prepare for the wedding. Molly had acquiesced to the suggestion of remaining home. In fact, felt it impossible to continue in the office with Oliver. But the early wedding she certainly had not contemplated. In vain she remonstrated. "Wouldn't it be nicer in the summer?"

"No, no," he argued, "summer is too hot."

"Well, then," suggested Molly, "June, before the hot weather begins?"

But Oliver was adamant. "Let it be April; no later." And Molly was forced to accede to his wishes. So it was set for the twentieth of April.

"The twentieth of April." Molly slowly repeated to herself. "And this is the sixteenth of March—little over a month."

Her mother was astounded when informed by Molly of her engagement to Oliver. Just what she thought, the man had alienated Molly's affections from Roger, that was certain. Not for a minute did she guess the truth of the matter. The girls were thrilled at the prospect of the wedding, though Betty said: "Talk about changing, old dear, it seems to me everybody and everything has changed this last year, yourself included. Sure you're happy, Moll? Don't see how in blazes you could give up Roger for that horrid Oliver. Never trusted that bird; sly as an old fox. But you'll have loads of money. Guess that's what got you, though I bet you're not as happy as you were the night you and Roger became engaged. Remember, you came in our room and sat on the bed to tell us? Gee, your eyes were dancing that night."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Never mention it; never mention it again!" cried Molly frantically, and grabbing up some sewing she had been working at, rushed from the room, both girls staring after her open-mouthed, amazed.

"Well, can you beat that?" Betty said perplexed. "Gosh, I don't know what this family is coming to. What do you suppose is the matter with that girl; getting a chap with money to burn, and she doesn't need to marry him if she doesn't want to, either?"

"Don't ask me," replied Shirley, looking mournfully out of the window. "Molly must be feeling something like I am, and that's not any too happy, I'll say."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"My, what a cold, snowy, bleak night for the last week of March!" and Betty threw open the window, prior to jumping into bed beside Shirley, who was cuddled well into the blankets, with not much more than her curly head visible.

"Yes, it is cold, Betty. But hush, listen to poor little Ronny coughing. He's not nearly as strong as he was a year ago. I wonder why?"

"I don't know," answered Betty, as she tucked herself in, "unless he is worrying about Cliff. Molly thinks he is. Poor little youngster. By the way, it's nearly three o'clock, and that brother of ours isn't home. I didn't see him at the dance tonight, either. Did you?"

"No, I didn't. He and Jack White went off on a party of their own. Guess he'll be along soon."

Little Ron in the next room was saying the same thing to himself, as he lay feverish and coughing, but could not settle down to sleep till he knew Cliff was home. Night after night he had lain listening for him, waking invariably through the night to listen for the sound of Cliff's roadster, and often creeping out of bed to peek in the room across the hall, which was Cliff's, to see if he were in bed.

Tonight he had slept more fitfully than usual, wakening frequently. At last, not long after the girls had come in and gone to bed, Ronald thought he heard a sound as if someone were talking down at the side door, directly below his window. Sitting up

THE POWER OF GOLD

quickly, he listened. Yes, sure enough, Cliff was there talking. Perhaps someone was with him, or perhaps he couldn't get in. Quietly he slipped out of bed and crossed to the open window. Leaning out he could plainly discern his brother sitting on the steps leaning against the side of the house. Oh, poor Cliff! Ronny was instantly filled with solicitude; he must be ill, or hurt. He called softly: "Cliff, are you hurt? Why don't you come in?"

"Who's that?" answered Cliff, looking up. "Come on down. Latch key fell; can't open door," and his head dropped forward on his chest. Then it was that the truth dawned on poor Ronny. The fearful knowledge that Cliff, their Cliff, the brother he loved so well, was drunk—just like the young man he had seen that time on the curb.

Sobbing, he rushed from the room. He must help Cliff. Get him in; not let his mother know. To waken and solicit help from the girls never entered his mind. He was too agitated to plan any line of action, save getting Cliff in and to bed without waking his mother, so she should never learn that Cliff was drunk. Flying downstairs through the hall, his little bare feet making scarcely a sound, he reached the side door. Opening it wide, he ran out on the porch, the snow clinging to his feet and the cold March wind blowing against his scantily clad little body. But he was oblivious to it all. Bending over Cliff, he grabbed him by the arm and, still crying sorrowfully, begged him to try and get up.

Cliff looked at Ronald with his bleary, bloodshot eyes, saying: "What you cryin' fer, kid; what's a matter?" And he tried to raise himself, but with a drunken grunt fell back against the wall

THE POWER OF GOLD

and closed his eyes. Vainly did Ronald endeavor to wake him, but without success. In desperation he gathered some of the soft snow and rubbed it quickly over his brother's face. This roused him from the drunken stupor he had fallen into, and again Ronald tried to pull him to his feet, crying and imploring him to try and walk. The sight of Ronny's tears streaming down his face sobered Cliff somewhat, and with a determined effort he drew himself up and put his arms around the lad's shoulder, telling him not to cry; he would be alright; he could walk; would go right up to bed, and though he staggered often and leaned heavily on poor Ronny, managed to make the stairs, and with the help of the banisters, pulled himself along. At last he gained his own room, where he dropped heavily on the bed and was asleep almost immediately. The room was quite warm, as the windows were closed; so, pulling the comforter well over him, Ronny tiptoed out, closing the door softly behind him, and ran again quickly downstairs to the side door, which still stood open. Closing and locking it, he hastened back upstairs, shivering from head to foot.

As he reached the top steps, Betty opened her door, saying in a whisper, "What on earth are you doing, Ronny? Where have you been?"

Ronald said nothing, but glanced towards Cliff's door, which Betty, running across the hall, opened.

"Oh, don't, Betty," whispered Ron instantly. "He's asleep." Then through chattering teeth he told her what had happened.

Betty, with a shocked, "Oh, you poor child!" picked the little fellow up in her arms, carried him back to bed and tucked him in,

THE POWER OF GOLD

but he still shivered. Betty, thoroughly frightened, ran to her room to waken Shirley. Both girls decided it would be better to get Molly up. Molly would know what to do just as well as Mother, for it was Molly who helped nurse them when they were ill. So to Molly they flew, and through the remainder of the night she and the two girls worked to stave off the chills and fever that were threatening the little lad as a result of his exposure, and through it all he would beg of them not to tell their mother; and they, in soothing terms, reassured him.

The next day, and for days following, Cliff was indeed sober, for the house was thrown into the utmost confusion. Ronald's case soon developed into double pneumonia. The best medical skill and most competent trained nurses seemed unable to stay its course. Cliff scarcely left the house. It was with the keenest remorse the occurrence of that night was brought to his mind. He remembered how he had fallen on the steps, unable to go farther; of Ronny bending over, urging him; how he had tried to brace up; the long flight of stairs; the little boy's sobs—all came rushing to his mind now as he walked through the rooms, his face blanched and grief-stricken.

The girls, too, were grave and concerned by this awful thing that had come to them. Molly and her mother, with unshed tears, worked tirelessly with the two nurses. Ronald was now unconscious. All the comfort the nurses would give them was, "We'll hope for the best, Mrs. Wainwright," and "If his strength will only hold out."

Day by day he grew weaker, till at last one morning the doctor came downstairs looking unusually grave and spoke to

THE POWER OF GOLD

Margaret and Philip, who were anxiously waiting in the hall. The doctor was an elderly man, used to illness—used to sad sights—used to breaking the news where no hope could possibly be held out, and now as he advanced and laid a hand on the arm of each with the utmost sympathy in his voice, he said: "I'm sorry, more sorry than I can express; but I'm afraid we're losing out."

"You don't mean, Doctor—" Margaret began, trembling so she could scarcely speak. "You can't mean that he won't recover."

"I'm afraid it's just that, Mrs. Wainwright; just that. I meant to tell you last night, but decided it would be better to wait until this morning. See if there might not be some improvement; but this morning he is much weaker—very much weaker. In fact, he is so low that I doubt if he will be with us by noon." Cliff and the girls had crowded, with anxious faces, into the hall and were overcome by this sad communication. Yet, it was what they had feared from the first.

The morning wore on. Mrs. Ross, who had heard of their trouble and had been very kind and solicitous in inquiring for the little patient, called to take Dorothy home with her; keep her out of the way until, as one of the nurses said as she passed her, "everything is over, Mrs. Ross."

About noon one of the nurses ran quickly down the stairs and called: "Mrs. Wainwright, come quick; he is sinking fast," and with flying feet, they hastened to the sickroom—Margaret, Philip, Cliff and the girls. There they stood around the bed crying piteously. Margaret dropped on her knees, her arms around the tiny form. Finally Ronald opened his eyes, smiled faintly up at his mother and murmured softly: "Cliff."

THE POWER OF GOLD

Cliff was by his side instantly, the tears streaming down his face; he whispered brokenly: "Little pal, my own dear little pal."

Ronny closed his eyes, but in a moment opened them, looked earnestly into the eyes of his brother, and apparently with great effort, in a voice scarcely audible, spoke: "Don't drink—any—more—Cliff. Please, don't." And Cliff, his shoulders heaving with sobs, bent his head to the little one as he answered in a hushed voice and gave his promise.

A relieved expression passed over the child's features as he looked up at his brother. Then looking beyond him to Betty and Shirley, he murmured: "Betty, Shirley, don't smoke—or—or take that wine."

"No, no," they sobbed, "we won't! We won't!" And then, with a peaceful smile overspreading his face, a contented little sigh, the brown head fell slightly back. The nurse motioned Philip to take Margaret away, herself approaching the bed and drawing the white sheet up over the still little form.

Cliff rose and followed the sad procession from the room, his head bowed, choking with sobs. When they reached the living-room downstairs, he stood beside his mother and said, brokenly: "Mother, I'm not going to ask you to forgive me. I know you can't—now; perhaps never."

Molly made signs for him to stop, that his mother knew nothing. But Cliff kept right on acquainting both father and mother with the true facts of the case, and ending with: "So I must leave now—today. I can't stay and see that little body laid away. Don't ask me to, Mother, it is too much. I want to go away to the ends of the earth."

THE POWER OF GOLD

But Margaret looked up at him through her tears and pleaded with him saying: "No, no, Cliff; don't blame yourself, and don't go away. That won't help matters any. I forgive you, Cliff. Oh, I love you, my son; and so did our darling Ronny. He would want you to stay—no matter what you did he would want nothing but your happiness, the dear child."

"I can't expect any happiness, Mother; and I can't remain, knowing that I have brought such sorrow to you."

"No, no, my boy; not you. It's entirely the money. Oh, Philip," she said, turning to her husband, "money, with its great power for good or evil has proved only evil in our lives. We had money which we did not make good use of. Wealth has the power to wreck happiness as well as make happiness. I've worried and wept more since we came to this house, with all our money, cars and servants, than ever in my life before. Even our poorest days, when we had scarcely enough to eat! At least, I had an easy mind; my children around me growing into the fine personalities I had hoped for. But this last year—how hard it has been! I've had to stand by and watch them stepping aside from all those high principles, travelling paths that I knew could only lead to misery and heartaches, and now our little son, our darling! Oh, we have paid dearly for the ease and luxury which we allowed our children to indulge in. It hasn't been right. I felt time and again it wasn't right. But, Philip, dear, you couldn't see it"; and she broke again into bitter weeping.

Poor Philip stood with tears rolling down his cheeks, as he answered in broken sobs: "I know, Margaret, now, when it's too late! But I did so want to give them all the good times I could;

THE POWER OF GOLD

to make up for those other days when they had it so hard. But I never, oh, I never expected this! I thought you were too much concerned about Cliff and the girls. I see it now! I see it now!"

Just then a nurse appeared at the door and motioned Cliff into the hall, speaking in low quick tones. Then, as they both ran for the stairs, Cliff said hurriedly: "Don't speak of it to the others yet."

Reaching the sick room, the nurse entered, while Cliff hurried into the library upstairs to call the doctor, but he had no need, for as he took off the receiver the front door opened and the doctor could be heard coming upstairs. Cliff ran to meet him with the news the nurse had given him, that though both nurses waited for each breath to be his last, and had cleared the room, fearing a convulsion at the end, the end had not come. Instead the patient had slightly rallied, seemed scarcely perceptibly stronger, yet the nurse felt there might still be a chance.

"Hm," replied the doctor gravely, "there might be, but I doubt it."

"But, Doctor, where there is life there is hope," answered Cliff, shaking like a leaf and peering anxiously into the doctor's face, his lips trembling so he could scarcely form the words. "Don't you think you can do something?"

"My dear young man," spoke the doctor kindly, as he laid his hand on Cliff's shoulder, "we have done all we can. If his strength only holds out till the crisis is past! But I don't want to raise false hopes. Don't speak of this to your parents, please. It wouldn't be kind, till we are certain. I'll go in now and see the lad."

THE POWER OF GOLD

Cliff, left standing alone outside the bedroom door, turned towards the library, the room adjoining his bedroom, where he shut himself in and, sitting down at the desk, put his head down and wept. Was the little boy, after all, to go from them? He had hoped after what the nurse had told him. But now, apparently, there wasn't any hope. No, as the doctor had said, they had done all they could. Oh, this was awful—awful, and it had all been his fault. Why couldn't he have had stamina enough not to lose his head over a little money! Oh, if they had never got riches! Yet, that wasn't it. No, Milton Harwood had all kinds of money, and where was there a finer living fellow anywhere? And the good he was doing with that money, too! And Doctor Ellis had lots of money, yet he lived simply and spent wisely, using so much of his riches to alleviate the sick and suffering poor. As his mother had said, money was a great power for good or evil. He had used it for the latter. This power of gold got him into the drinking, gambling, carousing class, that was all. It was environment; the taste for liquor was in him, that was evident. Perhaps born in him for generations past, for all he knew. He should never have run the risk of touching the stuff. Damnable! that's what it was, and a man was worse than an ass to think he could take it or leave it alone. He had thought so, too—thought he would be like the rest of them. Didn't want to be considered odd by refusing a glass of wine or a highball. Yet, a dozen times was it better to be judged odd in refusing than ruin his life like this and bring sorrow to his parents. They had had enough to bear; this was needless. Oh, if he had never touched the infernal stuff! He couldn't take it or leave it; neither could the other boys.

THE POWER OF GOLD

As a matter of fact, they drank their fill, every one of them.

In the short months he had gone with the crowd, look at the price some of them paid for their folly! There was poor Bill Warner! In a drunken brawl over cards in his room one night he had shot his friend, and then, sobered by the terrible deed, had turned the revolver on himself; and Rob Elliott, another of their set—four of them had gone joy riding, lost control of the car on a steep grade, and poor Rob had paid with his life. Why had these tragedies not shown him the folly of it all? Why hadn't he called a halt then? But no, he hadn't sense enough; hadn't sufficient willpower; and now poor little Ron was having to pay the price.

"Oh, if I had never touched the first glass," he groaned; and the memory of Christmas night came before his mental vision. He saw Myrtle holding the glass to his lips, as she smiled tauntingly up at him. Myrtle it was who urged him to break his resolutions. But no, he wouldn't be such a cad as to put the blame on a woman. His own fault to let any woman tempt him.

It was twilight when he emerged from the library. The lights were on in the hall, the house was strangely quiet—not a sound could be heard but the patter of the nurses' feet in the room opposite and an occasional word spoken by the doctor in a low, deep voice. How he longed to know how the dear little patient was, and if success were to attend the efforts of those untiring workers who were battling with death behind that door.

Presently he went softly downstairs into the living-room, which he found lighted, but no signs of anyone. Walking quietly down the hall, he went into the den, where a bright fire burned

THE POWER OF GOLD

in the grate and where the family clustered around silently. His mother raised her head as he entered, smiled wanly and motioned him to a chair by her side, and when he was seated, laid her hand lovingly on his, whispering: "There's a ray of hope, Cliff. The doctor thinks if he can only pull through tonight. They have scarcely left him, those nurses and the doctor."

"How is his strength holding out, Mother?" Cliff pressed her hand in mutual sympathy. And he spoke in a hushed tone, his voice vibrating with emotion.

"Just holding his own—that's all," and Margaret's face resumed the expression of anxious vigil. "They are to let us know immediately, if there is the slightest change."

Just then the maid tapped lightly at the door to ask about dinner, kindly offering to lay it there on the den table, if they preferred, her voice full of sympathy. The Wainwrights had always been most kind and considerate of her, and she felt now, in their trouble, was an opportunity to reciprocate, though Nancy did not express her feelings in just those terms, but her offer to set the dinner in the den met with no acceptance; no one wanted dinner. Then the girl, crossing to where Molly sat, whispered to her and, as Molly nodded her head, Nancy smiled with satisfaction and left the room, returning shortly with hot coffee and toast. The toast they left untouched, but the coffee proved to be both sustaining and refreshing; and so, far into the night they sat, sometimes one and then another tiptoeing upstairs when they heard one of the nurses in the hall, to ask her with bated breath: "Is there any change; is he still unconscious?" The answer was always the same: "Yes, he is still unconscious, and just about

THE POWER OF GOLD

the same." So the night dragged on. At length early morning dawned and sleighbells could be heard jingling in the distance on the clear morning air.

Cliff rose and pulled up the blinds. The sun was just peeping over the horizon, glistening on the soft white snow. He turned off the lights and replenished the fire. Just then he heard a step on the stair. His face blanched with fear and dread, as he quickly opened the door and encountered the nurse turning to enter. One look at her face and he knew. She answered his unspoken question:

"Yes, the crisis is past. It has been a long, hard pull, but it's over now; the little fellow will live. The doctor will have breakfast and then go to bed here, if you don't mind. He wants to watch the case closely. And now you had better all have some sleep, too. I know how you feel—it's the reaction," for their tears were flowing freely, tears of utmost thankfulness and relief.

A moment more and the faithful little maid again entered. This time she had taken the law into her own hands, and was wheeling in the tea wagon, heaped high with delicious bacon, eggs, toast, marmalade and tea. "Not coffee this morning," she explained with a bright smile; "it would keep you awake, and you must sleep—all of you. Cook and me'll be quiet as mice. Here, Mrs. Wainwright, let me pour the tea. There now; and you, Mr. Cliff, pass it. I declare it's morning tea party you are after havin', and that blessed little feller upstairs goin' to get better an' all. It's thankful we all are, Mrs. Wainwright," and wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron, she slid out to the kitchen, leaving the family alone to rejoice in the fact that their darling was spared.

CHAPTER XXX.

The days following that night of vigil were the happiest Margaret had spent since they moved from the bungalow. Little Ronald improved rapidly. Everyone was bright and cheerful, the girls doing all in their power to make things easier for their mother. Betty, taking her mother by the arm one day, led her into the den and, pointing to a number of packages of cigarettes lying in the unlit fireplace, said: "Look, Mummy, look at that for a smoke; and here is more fuel to add to the fire," and she produced a slip of paper. "The recipes for all those cocktails we used to begin our dinner parties with. Mummy, dear, you didn't know how much liquor we had in them, or you would have taken a conniption fit. No wonder the boys were 'stewed,' and the girls, too! And it wasn't only that, Mother. but the wines Cliff used to order when we entertained! You never knew the half of it! Well, no more drinking in this family, or smoking, either! You just sit here in this chair, Mother, and watch me touch a match to the whole conglomeration of foolishness." As she struck the match, the flames leaped upwards and Betty sat on the arm of her mother's chair and watched, twining her arms around Margaret's neck, saying: "We led you an awful life this while back, Mother, dear, but we are going to be good 'bairnies' from now on."

"Yes," said Shirley, as she entered the room and took her place on the other arm of Margaret's chair, "we must have been crazy—plumb crazy! But Betty and I are going to turn over

THE POWER OF GOLD

a new leaf. I'm going back to my music and Betty to her business course. Oh, there's Cliff!" as his steps could be heard passing down the hall. "Let's call him in, too."

"Oh, Cliff," called Betty, "come in here a minute. We're in the den." Looking in, he saw the tableau and, smiling, said as he sauntered up to his mother's chair: "I guess I'm in on this, too. Been burning the cigarettes, have you, girls? Mine are already burnt or I would add them to the collection."

"We burnt the cocktail recipes, too," said Shirley, looking up at him.

"That's right, girls; no more of the blamed stuff for any of us. We've had our lesson!"

"Oh, I'm so glad!" Their mother's voice shook with emotion. "Children, you don't know how much good this has done me! What a burden rolls off my mind to hear you say that, Cliff! I'm so glad! Oh, I'm so very, very glad and relieved! And the girls are both going back to their studies. Isn't that fine?"

"Me, too, Mother. I have made arrangements to go back to my old law firm. I'm going to take an exam this June and then my finals next year. How is that, Mother?"

"That is just too good to be true," spoke Margaret, as she glanced with tearful, thankful eyes up at the happy, contented face of her son. "As we are having this little talk, my dears, let me make a suggestion. Would it not be advisable to pick up again the threads of friendship that you dropped when we moved here? Those fine worthwhile boys and girls! They have all been so kind to us, and have inquired so often for Ronny, offering to help us in any way they could."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Yes, Mother," spoke Betty, "and the other crowd left us severely alone in our trouble. When we couldn't wine them and dine them, they gave us the 'go by.' I'm beginning to get their number. Never mind! We'll go back to where we belong, eh, Mummy?"

"That's right," replied Margaret, her face beaming. "When Ronny is better, we will invite them all in some evening for a good old-time reunion."

"Alright, Mummy, I'm with you," acquiesced Shirley. "Now, let's go and see how Ronny is."

When they reached the bedroom, they found Ronald sitting propped up with pillows in a rocker by the window, still thin and pale, but very happy.

"Oh, Cliff," he called out gaily at the sight of his brother, stretching out his hands towards him. Cliff, coming over to the chair, patted the child's head lovingly. Ron leaned his head against Cliff's coat and reached out his arm to his mother, drawing her face down to kiss, then to the girls.

"Oh, I'm so happy! I love you all so! The very bestest family there ever was."

"You darling!" smiled Margaret. "Hurry and get strong because I have a secret to tell you."

"Tell it now; tell it now, Mummy!" begged Ronny. "I'm in the mood to 'preciate a good secret."

"I want to know the secret, too," said Betty, sitting down on the window seat, where Shirley had already perched herself.

"Nobody knows but Daddy and I," began Margaret. "Well, it's this: As soon as Molly is married, we're going to move from

THE POWER OF GOLD

this home. We've sold it and bought that pretty one that I liked so much, down by Mrs. Mason's."

"Oh, I know!" exclaimed Shirley. "I went through it with you and Dorothy one day. It was an English type house—stucco, with a lovely long living-room, a cozy den and cut-stone fireplace, window boxes and everything."

"I know the place, too," added Ron. "It has a breakfast room with a fireplace that Mother said would be nice for Dorothy and I to do our lessons in."

"Yes, that's the place," said Margaret. "It is not a large, palatial place like this, but I think it will suit our requirements splendidly. Then I have another secret that is also to take place after Molly is married. Daddy, Dorothy, you and I, Ron, are going home to England for the summer."

"Oh, Mother, isn't that grand! Oh, I'm so glad; and we'll see the sunsets, and I can paint them again. Just like those I sold that Christmas we were so poor," and Ronald clapped his hands in delight. "Here is nurse coming in. May I tell her?"

"Yes," answered Margaret. "Now we must go. Come, children, come into the library. I want to talk to you," and Margaret led the way into the room where a few weeks ago Cliff had spent that heart-rending afternoon; but now everything was joyous.

Sitting down at the big bay window, the girls on the chesterfield, Margaret in a rocker, Cliff again at the desk, but this time to take pencil and paper and jot down the figures his mother gave. As he poised his pencil, he entered into the plans his mother had made, approving them most heartily. "So you have sold this place? What did it bring, Mom?"

THE POWER OF GOLD

"We got forty thousand for it, and paid twelve thousand for the new place."

"Hm," said Cliff, as he figured, "that leaves a balance of twenty-eight thousand. That's very good. Well, Mother, I would strongly advise Dad to give up speculating. He will lose it all sure, if he doesn't. I haven't such great confidence in Oliver Blake, either. He is too darned self-centered and too high and mighty with Dad. I don't like the way he treats him."

"Neither do I, Cliff. But don't worry, your Dad is simply enamored with the art store next to Blake's. The owner, Mr. Sanborn, wants to sell out, and Dad has decided to take the place over. That is one thing he can make a success of."

"Yes," agreed Betty, "it will be much better than having any more business dealings with Oliver. My, I don't know what Molly wants to marry him for."

"Unless it's his money," spoke up Shirley. "Yet, that isn't a bit like Molly."

"I don't know, either," said her mother. "But don't say a word to her about our plans. Dad doesn't want Oliver to know yet. Thinks it might lead to a misunderstanding between Oliver and Molly. He wants Molly's happiness above everything; as we all do. So don't let's worry her about anything of our plans until after the wedding."

Had they seen Molly at this moment, they wouldn't have given much for her happiness. It was just two weeks from her wedding day; the dressmaker was busy in the sewing-room at the rear of the upper hall, which looked directly over on to the side veranda of the next house. This afternoon the seamstress was working

THE POWER OF GOLD

on the wedding gown. The folds of shimmery white satin lay on a sheet as she basted and stitched. Dorothy, sitting with her doll at the far end of the room, viewed the scene fascinated. Indeed, her delight knew no bounds, when presently the seamstress turned to Molly, who was sitting idly by the window, and asked would she please try the dress on. The color mounted to Molly's temples, then left her white as death. This was her first fitting, and she had dreaded it all day. She had planned her wedding dress with such joy when it was for Roger; but now, how could she! Oh, if Roger only knew! But would he care? Would it mean anything to him? Yes, even if he did care, if he still wanted her and her alone, she had to go on. The memory of that day, weeks ago, the scene in the library, her father holding the revolver! Oh, no, no! There must be no chance of that being repeated. Put on the dress and have it over with. Other girls had done as much for their families. With her face pale and sad, though she tried to smile, to look pleased, she rose and went forward standing on the white sheet. The seamstress gathered the soft satin together, then gently dropped it over the girl's brown head.

"You look pale, Miss Wainwright. Are you tired?" she asked solicitously.

"It's nothing," answered Molly. "A little warm in here, that's all."

"Then I'll open the window. It's a lovely spring day. Next door they have the gramophone out on the veranda, and the girls, without even sweaters on, are dancing out there, it's that warm." Crossing the room, she threw open the window, returning to arrange the draping, pinning it up here and down there, her head

THE POWER OF GOLD

turned this way and that to get the effect. "How is that?" she inquired of Molly; but Molly didn't answer. She was standing transfixed, listening to the strains from the gramophone on the veranda, the sweet well-known notes of "The West, a Nest and You" drifting up through the soft spring air.

"Oh, take it off, please," cried Molly. "Quick, I think I'm going to faint."

The woman in haste undid the pinning and quickly released Molly, who rushed from the room to her own. Little Dorothy, with frightened face, ran after her, saying: "Oh, Molly, did she make you stand too long? Don't cry!" as Molly dropped into the chair and buried her face with her hands. "Wait, I'll fix the bed," offered Dorothy, pulling the pillows in shape as she had seen the nurse do for Ronald. Then she looked under the pillows. What was that? A picture! And picking it up, she gazed at it, her blue eyes staring wide with surprise. Roger—a picture of Roger under Molly's pillow. Without a word, she replaced the picture and coaxed Molly to come and lie down; which Molly did, Dorothy spreading the coverlet over her, smoothing her hair and comforting her as best she could.

"Molly, honey, what are you crying for? Is it Roger, eh? Is it, Molly?" But there was only the sound of Molly's sobs. "Is it because he isn't coming to your wedding?"

"Yes, dear," chokingly answered Molly, wiping her eyes. "I suppose that's it."

"If he was at your wedding would you be happy then? Would you?"

"You don't understand, Dotsy. You see, we were such friends.

THE POWER OF GOLD

I feel terribly lonely without him; but don't tell the family, will you, Dot?"

"No, I won't tell them, Molly. You needn't be afraid." Then, with her little mouth trembling, she said: "Oh, dear, I wonder if this family will ever, ever all be happy again. It's most terrible, awful not to be. I wish he could come, Molly. Would he come if you asked him, coaxed and coaxed him hard?"

"No, Dorothy, that wouldn't do any good. You see, he doesn't love me any more, so what's the use; and then there's something else. Oh, it's all just hopeless. But I'll be alright. Now forget this, dear."

CHAPTER XXXI.

Dorothy was perplexed. Why was Molly so anxious to have Roger at the wedding? Dorothy liked Roger very much—much better than Oliver. Oliver didn't like children, and took no notice of the little girl, while Roger had long since won her heart. Nevertheless, much as she deplored this state of affairs, Molly was going to marry Oliver, and her wedding mustn't be spoilt. If she wanted Roger to come to her wedding, why not invite him? If there was only someone to talk it over with. But Molly had said not to. Dorothy was both loyal and true, and would never repeat what was given to her in confidence. Therefore, if she had to decide this weighty matter alone, she would do it, and for days she thought and planned; but Roger was so far away. If she wrote, it would take so long before an answer could reach her. Four days having passed, in desperation she asked the seamstress one morning how long before the dresses would all be finished.

"Just one week from today, Dorothy," replied the woman.

"Is that the wedding day, then?"

"No, the wedding takes place one week from tomorrow night."

"Oh," gasped Dorothy, "that soon?" She picked up her doll and hurried from the room. A week, just one week! Why, it would take a letter nearly that time to get to him! She remembered Molly saying it sometimes took five days for a letter to reach Roger, if the boats were late. Oh, she must hurry; write and tell him all about it. That would be best. Tell him how Molly

THE POWER OF GOLD

cried because he wouldn't be here at her wedding; how badly Molly was feeling—never laughed or sang any more. Thinking it all out, the child ran downstairs to the den, seated herself at her father's desk and began the letter, writing as fast as she could, running the words together, and when she forgot how to form the letters in writing, she printed them. At last, this wonderful epistle finished, the little girl addressed it, much as she had seen Molly do: Doctor Roger Holmes. But here she was stuck completely. The name of the place she was familiar enough with, but how to spell it, she hadn't the remotest idea. Nothing daunted her, however. Slipping out of the room, the letter clutched tightly in her hand, peering continuously in all directions, hoping no one would see her, she flew upstairs, this time to her own room. Grabbing her bank from the table where it was kept, and putting on her best hat and coat, she crept noiselessly down the stairs, opened the front door and sped as fast as her little legs would take her down the walk, out the gate and away in the direction of the street car. Not a car in sight. She waited patiently. Would it never come? From time to time she looked back to see if anyone had missed her. Never had Dorothy been allowed to go on the street car alone, and the child expected to be intercepted at any moment; but perhaps they would think she was playing in the garden. This thought eased her mind somewhat, and here was the street car at last rounding the corner. It stopped. Dorothy climbed on with the help of the conductor's firm grip on her arm, and away they went. As they neared the business section she left her seat and went back to the conductor, asking him to let her off as near the post office as possible.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Right you are, Miss. I shall tell you when we reach it." Dorothy took her seat again, and in a few more blocks he called out, "Post Office." Dorothy jumped to her feet, ran to the door and in a moment more was standing alone on the street. Looking around her, she recognized the big stone building on the corner as the post office. She had often come here with her mother to mail parcels for England. So, with recovered self assurance, she entered and walked up to the wicket her mother always went to. After telling the man what she wanted and where the letter was to go, he took it from her, wrote the name of the place on it, stamped it and handed it back with directions where to mail it.

"Thank you so much; you're very kind," said Dorothy. "It's an awful important letter."

The letter posted, she hastened home, taking the first car that came along, though doing so necessitated her changing cars three times. But the conductors were always kind and helpful and, without any mishap, she arrived home and into her own room again without encountering any member of the family. Fortune favored her in this respect; for, though she was not aware of it, her mother was over at Mrs. Mason's in connection with arrangements for the coming wedding, and Molly was down town with Betty and Shirley making a few last purchases. But it was good to be back in her own little room again, for the trip, as well as the excitement of it all, had made the little girl very tired, so she crawled up on the bed and went fast to sleep.

Meanwhile the girls came home; Molly to her room where, of late, she spent more than half her time, sitting in the little rocker by her work table, thinking or reading over Roger's letters, some-

THE POWER OF GOLD

times taking up his picture, as she did today, looking lovingly at the dear dark eyes smiling back at her. How could she put it away for the last time! Kiss it good-bye forever, with the knowledge that henceforth Roger was to be just a memory; all their plans for that little home in the "West" bygone dreams.

They had been so much to each other; such compatability of temperament was theirs, that those happy days spent together had indeed been joyful ones. But it was all over now, forever. Only a week now—just one week of freedom; only a few short days with Roger's letters and all the dear memories, then they must be put from her—burn the letters and try to force those lovely memories out of her mind entirely. The only thing to do; the right thing, for, as Oliver's wife, it would be disloyal, ignoble to go on like this. But how could she ever get through the coming ordeal? Then on, on through the days, months, years! She closed her eyes and shuddered.

Several times she thought of talking with Shirley and Betty. It might not help any, and she couldn't confide everything; and certainly not about their father and that terrible revolver scene; but it would at least be a comfort to have someone who would even partly understand the complicated situation. With this in mind, Molly went in search of her sisters one evening. It was rather late—after ten. Her mother, tired out with the day's work and planning, had retired earlier than usual, as also the others, excepting the girls, who had been over to the Rosses for a while, and returning, had gone straight to their room. Molly could hear them laughing and chatting; like old times, she thought, as she slipped Roger's letters back in her bureau drawer. Well, she was

THE POWER OF GOLD

glad they were happy, anyway; and they, perhaps, could help her to happiness, too.

Opening the door, she went down the dimly lighted hall to the girls' room, tapped lightly on the door, and with Betty's, "Come in," turned the knob. There they were, fully dressed and curled up on the bed, chatting away, as Molly said, "For all the world like two magpies."

"Come on, Molly, sit here on the bed. We've had a wonderful time—too thrilling for words."

"Over what, may I ask?" said Molly, taking her old-time place at the foot of the bed.

"Oh," began Betty, "I don't know how to begin. You tell her, Shirley."

"No," laughed Shirley, "you tell her yourself; it was your idea, anyway."

"Alright," answered Betty, "here goes: Well, Molly, I guess you know that Shirley and I were none too happy after Milton and Don Ellis let us down with a thud the way they did when we started travelling too fast for them. Of course, we pretended not to care a hoot, tried to kid ourselves into believing it, too. But didn't make much of a fist of it, especially at Christmas. Say, just weren't we disappointed when they didn't bother to ring us up even; and poor Shirley here thought she was getting a box of red roses from Don Ellis and they turned out to be from Major Cole. Do you remember, Shirley, how you came in her and cried?"

"Indeed I do; and I cried in Molly's room, too," replied Shirley. "I felt I would never be happy again, and you cried a little yourself, Betty."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Sure I did! We were a sorry pair; thought we were martyrs, too. Didn't have sense enough to see it was all our own doing; and, believe me, that wasn't the only time we cried! We've had some bitter weeks. Once when we were coming home from a walk when Ronny was ill we hadn't eaten hardly anything all day, so we went to a tea room just for a little change. Well, we got it sure enough; but it was a change for the worse, for there, a few tables from us sat Milton Harwood and Don Ellis with two of the prettiest, sweetest girls you ever saw. They seemed to be having a very good time, too. Say, I couldn't eat a bite—went all sickish. I saw them first and drew Shirley's attention just as she was in the act of taking a bite of cake. She looked over to the other table and put the cake back on her plate. She turned all white and shaky, and in the weakest little voice said: 'Oh, Betty, let's go home.' The tea room made money on us that night, alright. After that we were always running into the same quartette somewhere, but I don't think they had seen us at any time till just after Ron was better—you know the time Dad took us out to lunch at a restaurant? Well, we were just about finished when I happened to glance towards the door and there stood Milton and the Doctor, looking around for a table; this time alone. Of course, it was lunch time, and I guess they just ran in for a bite together. They are always together."

"Tell me," interrupted Molly, "did they meet at our place for the first time, or had they known each other before? I have often wondered."

"Oh, before," answered Shirley. "Doctor Ellis told me they had gone to high school together. Then, you see, he went to a

THE POWER OF GOLD

medical school and Milton in the store with his father. His father was quite old; that is why Milton took over the business."

"Well, this day at lunch," continued Betty, "the Doctor saw us first, then he turned and spoke to Milton; and what do you think! They both came over to our table. Say, I trembled like a leaf and told Shirley to look; then she began shaking, too. Dad didn't notice us; he never does. I don't believe he has paid sufficient attention to our affairs to be aware of the fact that we were not so intimate as in times past, for when they reached our table, Dad said: 'Oh, hello there; haven't seen you two fellows for quite a time. Why don't you come to see us?' I could have shaken him! He's as bad as Dorothy, saying the wrong thing at the wrong time."

"I know," laughed Molly. "I expect Dad thought they were coming to see him and Mother, anyway. How did they answer him?"

"Oh, just mumbled something about being busy—that old, worn-out, trite excuse—then asked about Ron. Told Dad they didn't know the child had been ill till a few days before. Cliff had told them. They scarcely glanced towards Shirley or me; addressed what they had to say to Dad, and with a nod to us, moved away. I was so mad I could have sent both of them to the devil."

"Oh, Betty," laughingly admonished Molly.

"Well, I could have," resumed Betty. "You know me; when I'm hurt I can't keep the tears back. If we hadn't got out of there quick I would have been bawling like a calf. After that, we both decided to forget—just fall in line with the rest of the family

THE POWER OF GOLD

in turning over a brand new leaf and get to work. But I guess we fell in love over again instead, and weren't prepared to leave anything undone to put us back in the good graces of these men. I wasn't going to leave them for some other girls to line up, either; but you know how handicapped girls are in such matters. So we just had to bide our time till we met them again, which occurred at the dance Cliff took us to, with Mildred Ross, her brother and their cousin, Bill. It was one of the club dances, and Shirley said while we were dressing, 'Supposing Don and Milton are there! I was just in the act of putting on that navy blue georgette. I didn't care much what I wore; but when little Shirley piped up a suggestion like that, I took that dark blue right back to the wardrobe and fished out by pink sequence, and didn't I primp up! Shirley followed suit, and wore her lovely baby blue.'

"I remember," remarked Molly, smiling. "You both looked like fairy princesses. I spoke of it to Mother after you had gone to the dance."

"Well," continued Betty, "we felt pretty good, anyway, with the prospect of what might happen. They say anticipation is greater than realization. Rubbish! It was nothing to compare with the happy thrill I got when shortly after we walked into the ballroom I spied both our men of interest standing with a group of others near the orchestra. And, what luck, neither of those two girls in sight. My heart fairly danced. I looked over at Shirley and winked. To make a long story short, they saw us and smiled, but Milton never came near me till the party was half over. Then I saw him crossing the room. He came up to where I was standing with Cliff, who was my partner for the next dance,

THE POWER OF GOLD

and, oh, I felt all goofy. Milton just looked into my eyes with that serious expression, and said:

“‘May I have this dance with you, Betty,’ turning to Cliff with: ‘You won’t mind, will you, old chap?’

“Then I had one of my turn-turtle turns and found myself lifting my head two inches higher and saying, ever so sweetly, but very decidedly, ‘Sorry, Mr. Harwood, but I never skip dances; even if it is with my brother.’ I know my face flushed as red as a beet; but I beat it off with Cliff just the same, and as we danced away I could not resist looking back and there Milton was standing, still staring after me in amazement. I felt sorry then; but then was a minute too late.”

“Oh, Betty,” scolded Molly, “you were a goose.”

“I know I was, but why in the dickens didn’t he ask me to dance before. Of course, he didn’t come near me again till just as we were standing with our wraps on, waiting for Jack Ross to bring the car around—it had begun raining very heavily. Milton happened to be standing right beside me, he and Cliff talking about the storm, and Milton turned to me, saying:

“‘Why not let us take you girls home, Betty? I have my sedan.’

“But just at that moment Jack came up to say he had a taxi waiting; his cousin, Bill, would bring his car home. It appeared the rain had drifted in and got it all wet. My word, I was mad. I could have choked Jack. I would so loved to have gone with Milton. However, I thanked him with my most polite manner, and he said: ‘Well, I hope you won’t get wet. If you do, I suppose it will be an excuse for another little drink, eh, Betty?’

THE POWER OF GOLD

Cliff hastily answered for me with: 'The girls don't touch that stuff, Milton, old man; nor me, either. That's all a thing of the past in our family. Gone with the roadhouse parties and all the other foolishness.'

" 'I'm mighty glad to hear it,' Milton said in a serious, earnest voice; then bending towards me, he said: 'Betty, I'm more relieved than I can say.' Then he bent closer still and whispered in my ear, 'I've missed you terribly, Betty, dear,' and he took my hand and gave it a little pat. Oh, I was thrilled."

"No wonder," said Molly, smiling. "Now, Shirley, how did you fare?"

"Just splendidly, Molly. Doctor Ellis asked me for my programme soon after we arrived. He came over just after we finished the first dance and said: 'Well, Shirley, I'm glad to see you with the Rosses again; good friends of yours, the Rosses.'

" 'Yes,' I said, 'we all like them very much.' Then he asked me if he might have a few dances, just for old-times sake, and when he handed the programme back I found he had taken six."

"Six?" exclaimed Molly. "Well, that was nice! Gave you lots of time to chat, didn't it?"

"It surely did, for we sat out three in succession and had a real heart-to-heart talk. He told me how lonely he had been without me; how he had gone to the florists to send me a box of red roses at Christmas, and how he had seen Cole in there buying roses, as he explained to Don, 'to send to his fiance, Shirley Wainwright,' and Don didn't doubt the information for an instant, as he had seen me with the Major so often. That is how near I came to getting a lovely box of red roses from him at Christmas;

THE POWER OF GOLD

so I told him I appreciated his thoughtfulness, anyway, even if I had not received them. He spoke of phoning as soon as he returned from New York, a trip he expected to take soon. And when we were out on the club house verandah, he said: 'This is like old times, isn't it, Shirley?' Oh, Molly, I tell you, we were happy, Betty and I, after that dance."

"Haven't you seen them since?" asked Molly, in surprise. "Didn't they phone? You said something the other day, but I was thinking of something else at the time. I didn't pay much attention, I'm afraid."

"Oh yes," answered Betty, "we expected them to, but they didn't phone till today, because they were both away on this trip to New York; some club work they were interested in; I don't know exactly what it was. I was more interested in them coming home, which they did this afternoon and phoned us at once. It was when you and Mother were shopping. We told them we had promised to go over to Rosses for awhile and they asked if they could come for us; and you may guess we said 'yes.' So we all came home together; and, say, who do you suppose those girls were that they took out so much? One was engaged to Milton's cousin and the other to an old college chum of his. The girls are staying with Milton's mother, buying their wedding things. They are to be married in June, so we worried for nothing, didn't we, Molly?"

"It just shows," said Shirley, "where there really is no cause for worry, generally one frets one's self nearly to death. I suppose that's the way all through life. And then things which need a little thinking about, we let slide; like our actions last winter. It

THE POWER OF GOLD

didn't worry us a mite, and we should have been worrying our heads off. However, we are going out with Milton and Don tomorrow night to a dance. Mother says we had better include them in the invitations to the wedding."

The mention of the oncoming wedding brought Molly up with a start. She had been so interested in the affairs of her sisters that for the time being her own troubles were forgotten; but now the old pang of misery assailed her.

"Oh, girls," she began. "I have wanted to talk to you so much about this wedding of mine."

"Oh, wait," Shirley interrupted her, getting off the bed and going to a drawer in the dresser. "Here is a lovely silk negligee Dad asked us girls to help him select. He said he wanted you to have the best of everything. He thinks the world and all of you, Molly, and he is so pleased; to tell the truth, relieved, too, that you are going to marry Oliver. He was telling Betty and I the day we bought this negligee that at last he was on easy street. Nothing to worry about in finances. Was also telling us all that Oliver said he would do for him. Poor old Dad!"

"Yes, indeed," said Betty, "one, of course, can't have everything; real nice men and money can't be found, I guess; unless Milton, he is the only one I know of. Don, of course, too, he's alright. Dad has had such a hard time, no wonder he is relieved at the prospect of a millionaire son-in-law; for, as he told Shirley and me, he is too old for hardships now, or to have to begin all over again. He certainly looks far older than he is, too; and it's just the worry he has had. Dad was just sixty-five his last birthday and, I declare, he looks more like seventy-five."

THE POWER OF GOLD

Molly sat with tightened lips. "Yes," she admitted, "poor Dad! We must all be very good to him. He is older and not nearly so strong, either. But good-night, girls; I must go to bed, I'm so tired."

"You do look fagged, old dear! Better sleep late tomorrow," advised Betty, as the door closed.

Back to her room again, Molly undressed and went to bed, thinking as she did so: "No use telling the girls, after all. What they said about father was only too true." Molly knew it and realized with a heart-sick sensation the futility of any other course than what she had decided on weeks before.

CHAPTER XXXII.

The following week sped as on wings. The house was now agog with preparations. Package after package of finery, parcels for the bride, presents of all sorts, shapes and descriptions arriving from friends in and out of town, all added to the gaiety and radiant confusion. The girls were beside themselves with excitement. Their mother was equally as excited, eager to prepare everything in the nicest way possible. But as she noticed the wistful, far-away expression in Molly's eyes, she was filled with misgiving. Surely that was not the face of a happy bride-to-be! Margaret remembered her own wedding day. How joyful she had been! Molly was not like that; and yet, when she would ask: "Are you happy, daughter; sure everything is alright?" the answer was invariably the same: "Why, of course, Mother, I'm alright." Then with a forced little laugh: "I'll be just fine once it's over." But when her mother had gone to attend to some detail in regard to the preparations, Molly would again assume that pathetic, dazed look, murmuring to herself, "What shall I do? What shall I do? Was ever a mortal girl so perplexed, so worried beyond endurance?" The long, long life ahead, without love, without happiness, without Roger; their paths parting forever! Was it right? Could it be expected of her to make this life-long sacrifice? But supposing; just supposing she put an end to all these preparations. Told them she couldn't marry Oliver. What then? Of course, Oliver would be furious having her change her mind at this late date; and rightly so. It would be terrible.

THE POWER OF GOLD

The house bought and all furnished—everything prepared. Then, moreover, would that tragical scene in the den be enacted again, and perhaps without her timely assistance? No one to stay his hand or prevent him! If that terrible thing did occur and her Dad, her poor old Dad took his life, as he might do, would she ever be happy again? Could she ever expect any happiness when she could in this way have prevented it? Oh, what is the use of thinking about it, Molly chided herself, going all over it again and again. Go on, marry Oliver—that was the only thing to do; no alternative. She knew what she should do. Then be brave and do it. What was her happiness compared to the averting of such a tragedy? So, with a deep-drawn sigh, she would put the thought from her only to have it all sweep over her again when night came. Then she would lie awake in the darkness looking out on the still spring night, the air laden with the scent of blossoms drifting in from the open window, and as often as she thought the pros and cons of the terrible dilemma over and over again, each time coming to the same conclusion and determinedly putting it from her as finished and done with, so often did it return with full force, undaunted. She would turn and toss, her cheeks burning with fever until, from sheer exhaustion, would fall into a fitful sleep, only to waken in the morning with the warm sunshine flooding her room and, with a rush of consciousness, the ordeal began again.

* * * * *

Little Dorothy was alternately anxious and hopeful. The time was speeding on, day by day bringing the wedding nearer

THE POWER OF GOLD

and nearer, and no reply had come to her letter. At last it was the day before the wedding. The postman came shortly after breakfast, on his morning rounds. Dorothy scanned the letters one by one from Cliff's hand, as he stood looking them over at the table in the hall, but again she was disappointed. No letter from Roger.

"Who were you expecting one from, Dotsy?" Cliff asked her, looking down at the disappointed little face.

"Cliff," she impulsively began, paying no heed to his question, "if we sent an invitation now, right now, to Roger, when would we get an answer. Tell me, please?"

"Well," laughed Cliff, "in the first place, he wouldn't likely answer it, and if he did, we would get it in about a week's time—not any less. Even at that it would depend largely on the boats. But don't you dare do anything like that, Dotsy," he added emphatically. "Molly would feel very badly if you did."

"She'll feel badly, anyway," answered Dorothy.

"Oh, I don't know, Dot; girls are queer."

"Are they?" exclaimed Betty, coming into the hall from the den. "What particular girl is queer?"

"We were just speaking of Molly," Cliff turned to her. "Run away Dorothy, that's a good girl. Yes, we were speaking of Molly," he repeated, as Dorothy ran out the side door. "You know, Betty, she isn't a bit like I thought she would be—getting married. Seems so preoccupied. What is the matter with her? Is she sorry and wants to back out, do you suppose? Frankly, I can't imagine what she sees in Oliver, to give up a splendid fellow like Roger for," he went on without waiting for an answer.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"There is no comparison between the two, unless it's the money Oliver can lavish on her. Perhaps that's the attraction."

"I expect it's that," Betty spoke slowly, her brow wrinkled in a frown, "but it beats me. I would never have thought it of her. Guess you have to live with a person more than a life-time to really know them, and then they'll up and surprise you, won't they, Mom?" as she caught sight of her mother descending the stairs.

"Yes, I suppose so," replied her mother, paying little heed. "You two come in the den, I want to talk to you. By the way, where is Shirley? Oh, here she is," and Margaret opened the den door.

Shirley was busy in the den arranging the wedding presents on the two long tables that Cliff and their father had improvised for the purpose. She was smiling now, with her pretty curly head on one side, surveying her work.

"What do you thing of this arrangement?" she questioned them, as they walked in. "Or should this big blue vase go in the middle and these candlesticks on either side, and then all the silver arranged this way? There—how is that?"

"Lovely," said her mother, "lovely! Now close the door, please, Cliff. I want to ask you children something," and she sat down in an easy chair. "My, but I'm tired," she said, relaxing, "but I don't mind that at all. I want everything as nice as possible for Molly's wedding, though the poor child is not happy, I'm sure of that. I know my Molly, and I can see she is worried. It may be she thinks that you three will resume some of your old habits after she is gone and that as she is marrying into so much wealth,

THE POWER OF GOLD

it will be a bad thing for you all. One day last Christmas Molly and I were talking, and she spoke so strongly on the subject, saying she thought that it was the ruination of young people to have so much money that they didn't have to work; that in such cases the tendency was to play around and waste their time. Now perhaps that is all that is bothering her, so I think I'll go and tell her of our plans and about the place being sold."

"A good idea, Mother, but I wouldn't advise you saying anything till tomorrow," said Cliff.

"Why not today?" replied his mother, looking up in surprise.

"Well," and Cliff stroked his chin thoughtfully, "we're going to be terribly busy this afternoon. Doctor Ellis and Milton are coming over to help us, and the Masons, too. Then tonight Oliver is bringing some of his out-of-town relatives to meet us, and there is really so much to do and plan. However, you can let her know before she goes away, at all events."

"I have it," cried Betty. "Let's tell her just after she is married."

"Yes," nodded Shirley, "just after the wedding. Then she will feel less nervous, anyway; and we can have a little chat with her while she is changing into her travelling suit. Oh, won't she be pleased to hear of you and Dad and the kiddies going to England and of Dad not going to speculate any more. That's one thing that worried her, I know," and Shirley looked very solemn. "She knew Oliver and Dad didn't get along well, and I just know how pleased she'll be about Dad going into the art business."

"Yes," said Betty, "it certainly will please her, and also to learn about us moving into the new little home and getting to work again."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"What is this?" asked their father, as he entered the room, "a family council of some kind?" smiling from one to the other. "If so, I'm just in time. Let's have it."

Margaret explained to him about Molly and what they had decided to do.

"That's fine," he assented, "but I agree with Cliff. Leave it till after she is married. Don't bother her now. It will be a bit of good news for her to take with her on her wedding trip, for Molly's a great little worrier over her family, I know. But speaking of all this reminds me of something I have to tell you. Who do you suppose came into the office to see me this morning? Roger's father."

"Roger's father!" exclaimed Margaret in surprise. "What did he want?"

"You remember the oil shares I squandered our nest egg of two thousand dollars on?"

"Oh, yes," and Betty's face lit up, "from some old geaser I've always vowed vengeance on."

"Well," resumed Philip, "that was Roger's father."

"What?" they cried in unison, "Mr. Holmes?"

"Oh, surely not," declared Margaret. "He is such a fine man. I never would have believed it of him. I've met both him and his wife long ago, before they went to England."

"I remember," continued Philip. "I had a cold the night we were invited to meet them, and shortly after they left for the Old Country, so I didn't know it was Roger's father till today. I had really forgotten the name of the man I bought the shares from. However, a more contrite man I have never met. We had a long

THE POWER OF GOLD

talk and he insisted on paying me back the money. It appears that he has known for some time that it was I, Molly's father, whom he sold the shares to. Says his wife has been almost ill over it, and what's more, Roger found out about it at Christmas, and thought that was why Molly gave him up. But I assured him it wasn't at all. Told him, as a matter of fact, that I had not known that he was Roger's father."

"Well, if that isn't the cat's whiskers," laughed Betty. "What a mix-up!"

"Poor souls," murmured Shirley, "I feel sorry for them, because they are really awfully nice people. We've all met them excepting Dad, haven't we?"

"Sure we have," answered Betty. "Mr. Holmes and I hit it off particularly well. He is such a jolly sort. Well, well, of all things!" and Betty laughed again.

"Say, tell Molly that, too," suggested Cliff. "Then she'll know why Roger didn't phone her after Christmas. She felt sore about it, but I don't suppose it matters much now. However, you might as well let her know."

"I certainly will. I'll have a talk with her tonight. Or perhaps, as Cliff says, tomorrow would be better."

"Do whatever you wish," advised her husband. "I guess you know when is the best time—better than any of us."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

April the twentieth at last!

The whole household arose early to get a good start on the hundred and one items requiring attention. The numerous things to see to—phone calls, friends coming in, presents arriving, and so forth.

It was to be a house wedding, the bridal party to stand under an arch of flowers at the far end of the living-room.

Dorothy ran hither and thither, the most excited of them all. She had done her best to bring Roger to the wedding, but without success. Had not heard from him at all, so she decided they would have to go on, and have the wedding without him—and surely, with all these lovely things, the house looking so beautiful, everything so gay, Molly could not fail to be happy.

But Molly wasn't happy.

She had never closed her eyes in sleep all night, but sat by the window for the most part, crawling into bed in the early dawn to lie and watch for the daybreak, then the sun peeping over the horizon into full radiance of another day. Her wedding day! Could it be possible? She wondered if Roger knew—or cared? Was he sleeping? Did he think of what might have been?

Her reflections at this point turned to Oliver. He had brought his relatives to call last night—loud-talking, plebian, yet kindly folk, a way more pleasant than Oliver, thought Molly. Indeed, she had become very tired of Oliver, his selfishness, his desire to make everyone bend to his will. What he wanted he got. She

THE POWER OF GOLD

recalled so many little incidents in the office when, to gain his own ends, he had stopped at nothing. Ruthless—that was it; but after today she mustn't even think of these things—must be his wife, loyal and true. Oh, how could she, how could she!

After a while Dorothy tapped at the door and came running in to climb on the bed beside her, her arms tight around Molly's neck.

"Oh, you dear Molly, you're going to be a bride—a lovely pretty bride, all in white. Oh, you'll look wonderful! And what do you think, after you're married we're all going to England; that is, Daddy, Mother, Ronnie and I. Isn't that nice?"

"It certainly is," and Molly kissed the rosy cheek. "But are you sure, Dotsy?"

"Uh, uh, I'm sure," answered Dorothy, nodding her head, "and there's lots more to it than that; lots of news Mother's going to tell you before you go away. But jump right up now, Molly, 'cause Mummy says there's lots and lots of things to do for tonight, and she wants your advice about them."

Molly rose, dressed and went downstairs, trying so hard to be bright and cheerful, take an interest in the preparations; but her heart was heavy as lead. Noon came and went, the afternoon also sped quickly by. How she got through the day, Molly never knew.

She tried to give her mother the needed advice about the different arrangements; how to have the living-room furniture placed, which plates to use for the ice cream, where to have the small table for Mrs. Ross to serve it from.

Finally, the last detail decided, the last task completed,

THE POWER OF GOLD

Margaret stood for a moment in the hall, looking from one room to another, surveying their efforts with satisfaction. The house did indeed look beautiful. The wonderful flowers and gracefully drooping palms, artistically arranged around the furniture and draperies, gave a most harmonious effect. With a nod and smile of approval, she turned to Molly:

"Well, I think that's all, dearest. Everything is done now, so come and have a bite to eat before you go up to dress."

The light supper was served in the breakfast room, the dining-room table being in readiness for the reception, the four-tiered wedding cake in the centre.

As soon as they finished supper, Betty and Shirley scampered off to get ready, with Ronald and Dorothy at their heels. Margaret and Molly followed shortly after, going up to Molly's room, where her mother had already laid out her daughter's dainty garments.

Finally, bathed and ready for her dress, her mother slipped the wedding gown over Molly's head, smoothing it down, fastening the hooks. Then came the veil.

Margaret gazed at her with loving eyes. "Oh, you dear thing, you are a lovely bride. And now, darling, look happy; there is nothing to worry about. I wasn't supposed to tell you all our plans till after the wedding, but I somehow think you might like to hear them now," and she recited all the varied changes about to take place in the family.

During the recital Molly looked at her Mother in astonishment. Margaret patted the veil in place as she talked, then turned to look at Molly, who stood before her white as a ghost.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Mother!" she gasped, "why didn't you tell me all this before?"

"Why, what difference would it have made, dear?" But at that moment Dorothy, already dressed as a little flower girl, bounded in the door with: "Come, Mother, the girls say to hurry, hurry fast; the people are starting to come."

Away her mother flew and Dorothy after her. Molly sat heavily on the side of the bed. What was this her mother said? Did it mean that her sacrifices were all in vain? Oh, if she had only known, only been told all this before; what she could have been saved. Oh, if she had only known about their having sold the house; about Dad having bought out the art store—that he was free from Oliver—had thousands in the bank! If she had only known sooner! But it was too late now. About Roger's father, too! That was why poor Roger had left without a word. His father said he had been ashamed, ashamed to come near them even to say good-bye. It was all so clear to her now, so obvious. She trembled from head to foot. Walking across the room she closed the door which Dorothy had left partly open; then up and down the room she walked, wringing her hands. Oh, how awful! How awful; how needless! Why, they didn't need her to make any sacrifice—not at all. What would she do? Oh, this was terrible, terrible! Could she stop now? Could she? But as the question escaped her lips, as if the answer came to go on—no backing out now—too late—the girls with Mildred rushed in, exclaiming over her loveliness and taking her by the arm, saying: "Come, Molly, we're waiting for you. Your father is standing in the hall."

THE POWER OF GOLD

Molly turned and went out with a furtive glance around her. No escape, none. Oh, if her mother had only told her sooner—even one day sooner! And how happy she could have been, knowing the family were so well fixed financially, and going to England and all, and she could have broken with Oliver and in time made up this misunderstanding with Roger. But not now, not now! It was too late!

In the hall her father stooped to kiss her, and the wedding procession formed—Dorothy first, with a lovely basket of roses; next Shirley and Mildred Ross and directly behind them Betty and Bessie Roy, Molly's friend from the office. Each carried a sheath bouquet of lilies of the valley. Then came the bride, pale and silent, on her father's arm. They walked toward the wide stairway, the strains from the orchestra softly floating up, while in Molly's mind one thought alone remained: Oh, if I'd known; if I'd known! She looked down the long flight of stairs to the hall below, where the guests stood expectantly, talking in low whispers. A numb sensation swept over her as Dorothy took the first step on the stairs. Cliff, standing a few steps down, motioned them to go back, as he looked up smilingly.

"Not yet, the groom hasn't arrived. He phoned to say Cole had forgotten the ring, and they had to go back for it, but would be here any minute now. I'll tell you when."

Oh, thought Molly, if they would only hurry! Hurry and have it over with. Did Roger know? Did he care? Would she ever see him again? If she only knew that he even cared!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Roger did know of Molly's coming marriage and was in a frenzy of despair. The week before, in a letter from his mother, he had learned of the wedding.

As day by day went by he could neither eat nor sleep, and Chung, his faithful Chinese servant, was at his wit's end to know what to do for "Bossy man."

The night little Dorothy's letter arrived found Roger sitting by the fire in the tiny living-room, sad and lonely. It was a wild night, raining and blowing a terrific gale. Coming home to dinner a little earlier than usual, he had opened the paper which had just arrived by mail. Idly turning the pages, he came upon Molly's picture, announcing the forthcoming wedding on April the twentieth.

It was now the seventeenth. Three days and Molly, his Molly, would become Oliver Blake's wife! The paper dropped from his hand to the floor, and with white, set face, he stared into the fire. Vainly did the little Chinaman come to tell him, "Dinner leady now," but there was no answer.

Again trying to rouse his master, Chung said: "You get heap sick, you no eat dinner. Every day, all the time Bossy man no eat. By and by you starve, you die. Too bad, too bad! What for you all same sit, do nothing?" Chung shook his head perplexedly. Then a happy thought struck him, his face brightening as he turned to the gramophone in the corner. He would put on the record that in times past made "Bossy man" feel heap happy.

THE POWER OF GOLD

But at the first notes of the piece, for it was none other than "their piece," Roger jumped angrily to his feet, and with three strides, reached the gramophone, jerked the record off and threw it across the room.

"Never put that thing on again, do you hear?" and he scowled at Chung in a most furious manner.

"Yea, yea, me hear, me hear!" cried the frightened Chinaman. "Me allee same think you like him."

Then, with another attempt to interest Roger, suggested: "Me think you alla samee write you Mama plenty soon. Boat go heap quick! No more boat one week. Me hear whistle blow now; ten minutes more she go. You write your Mama letter. Chung run down post him."

Still no answer. Roger had returned to his place at the fire and was paying no attention. But Chung was persistent in his endeavor to arouse some interest. He would try new tactics. So, taking up the unread letters, he put one after the other in front of "Bossy man." Still no response. The last letter was Dorothy's. Chung knew it was her's as the name was printed: Dr. Roger Holmes, and in times past such letters often came. Chung had learned to call them little Missy's letters.

"Bossy man be pleased now," thought Chung, as he held it up crying exultantly:

"Oh, me no see heap long time! Letter flom little Missy." Then it was Roger lifted his head, gave the letter a fleeting glance, looked again; then all at once, keenly alert, reached for it, tearing it open just as the boat sounded the last long whistle. The missive ran thusly:

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Dere Roger :

"Won't you please come to Molly's wedding. She would have sent you an invatashion only she says you don't love her any more. She feels awful bad, and has your picture under her pillow all the time and cries some thing terable. You would be terable sorry for her if you could see her crie and she's not a bit mad at you cause she told me she loved you all the time and always will her whole life. I don't know why she is going to marrie Oliver only Oliver is going to be awful mad at Daddy if she don't and I guess he will take Daddy's money from him if Molly don't marrie him, so do please come and make Mollie happie at her wedding.

"Dorothy."

Roger sat straight and tense as he hastily read the letter. Then jumping to his feet, he dashed from the room, grabbing his hat and coat as he ran.

"The boat!" he cried. "The boat!" And jerking the front door open, he rushed out into the pelting rain.

"What's a mallee? What's a mallee?" called Chung from the kitchen. Then out the door after him, the toasting fork in one hand. "Poor Bossy man gone clazy, heap clazy," and Chung ran along after him, still unconsciously clinging to the toasting fork. Though his Oriental slippers retarded his progress somewhat, still he sped on as fast as he could towards the wharf, where he could see the lights of the boat at the dock. But as they neared it, they could see the vessel slowly moving out to the open.

Shouting with all his might, Roger ran on, but the howling wind drowned out any other sound, and not till he actually reached the dock could he gain the attention of the men hauling in the ropes.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Stop! Stop that boat!" he cried, and Chung, a short distance behind, added lustily to the command:

"Stop him boat, heap quick," he cried, waving the fork frantically.

Then men looked towards the pair in astonishment, and cupping their hands to their mouths, shouted to those on board, but the voice of the wind was louder.

Frantically Roger turned to the man: "Is there another boat this week?" he called.

"No, sir; no, Doctor, this is the last one," they shouted in reply.

"Then I must catch it! Get me a gasoline boat. I'll cross to the point and catch it there. Hurry, hurry! Who'll go with me and steer? I'll pay two hundred dollars to the man who'll help me reach the steamer."

By this time the men were hustling out the gasoline launch, filling the gas tank, making ready for the journey, while Chung stood shivering, his teeth chattering with cold, as, disregarding the toasting fork, he gripped his coat closer to him. Roger paced the wharf, seeking someone to accompany him on his perilous journey—but no man offered. Higher and higher Roger bid, but no man among them would risk his life on those tempestuous waves for any money. At last in desperation, he cried: "Get me the telegraph office, quick! I'll wire for them to hold the boat."

A man raced off to the telegraph office along the other side of the wharf, but soon came back with word that all lines were down due to the storm. It was then that Roger, buttoning his coat to the top, and with his hat jammed down on his head, stepped into

THE POWER OF GOLD

the boat alone; but Chung, faithful old soul, came to the fore.

"Wait, Bossy man, wait! Me allee same go too. No let Bossy go alone."

"I'll pay you well if you do, Chung," cried Roger, gripping him by the arm to steady the Chinaman as he stepped down into the boat.

"What's a malla? What's a malla? Me no want money!" Chung was indignant. "Me alla samee help Bossy man."

Despite the warnings of those who stood by, endeavoring to impress on Roger the futility of setting out on such a hopeless voyage, predicting dire disaster, Roger started the engine, turned the wheel and away they went. The little craft rose and fell on the crest of the waves, while the stormy sea tossed it from billow to billow. The rain descended in torrents, drenching them to the skin.

The men on the wharf watched till the launch was out of sight, then, greatly deploring the fact that Roger would listen neither to warnings nor reason, turned solemnly away. They liked the doctor, liked his cheery, kind manner, and were dismayed at the prospect of the fate that in all probability awaited him in those turbulent waters.

Meanwhile, Roger at the wheel fought the angry seas with all his might and strength, but as the night advanced, the storm grew fiercer. The wind howled around and over the little launch, till at last—snap—the rudder broke! Then it was that Roger realized it had been hopeless from the first. He should never have come, endangering the life of his poor faithful Chinaman. These thoughts and many others raced through his mind while the

THE POWER OF GOLD

rudderless boat was battered hither and thither by the angry waves. But uppermost in his thoughts was Molly. She would never know now that he had tried to come to her, unless the men at the wharf would tell the story of how he had endeavored to make the steamer and how vain that effort had been. Molly would surely glean from those obvious facts that he had been on his way to her. Then, there was Dorothy's letter, which was further evidence that such had been his desire to reach home before the wedding. He loved her! Surely some telepathic message would reach out and tell her that, and in the years to come she would be comforted by that knowledge.

He glanced now towards the terrified Chinaman, clinging with a tenacious grip to the side of the launch.

"Guess we can't make it, Chung," called Roger loudly, bending down lower that his voice might carry in spite of the storm.

"Me know," Chung called back bravely, "Me know we drown, plenty soon now. Bossy man no could help." Then, in a reconciled tone: "No matter, Chung no afraid."

Wilder and wilder howled the storm. The wind and rain lashed the little craft unmercifully. Then a mighty wave lifted the launch high, dashing it with terrific force on a jutting rock. Again it was hurled high, and again it crashed with renewed violence till, broken asunder, the two men were hurled far out into the surf.

CHAPTER XXXV.

In the morning the sun shone gloriously, the sky a deep blue, the sea calm; all traces of the storm that raged the previous night had disappeared, save for two bodies washed up on the beach, the hot rays of the sun beating down on their still forms.

Presently, with a faint stir, Roger opened his eyes. Where was he? He gazed up at the blue sky, lifting his hand wearily to shield his eyes from the glaring rays of the sun. A huge hawk flew high in the heavens, its far-away cry the only sound other than the waves gently lapping on the sandy beach. Roger drew himself up with difficulty. His head hurt and his body ached. He sat still for a few minutes, vaguely looking around. Where was he? What had happened? Suddenly, with a rush of consciousness, he remembered, recalled the storm, the dashing of the launch on the rocks. Why, they had evidently drifted close to shore to have hit on that jagged rock and the waves to have swept them up on the beach. A marvel he was not drowned! The tide must have been coming in. Had it been going out—well—he would have gone out with it. What of Chung? Had he, too, escaped a watery grave? Roger, scanning the beach, discerned the Chinaman lying face down on the sand some fifty yards away. With an effort, he struggled to his feet, staggered over and knelt beside the prostrate form. A hurried examination proved him still alive. He had evidently been struck on the head by a rock and was unconscious. His own head felt queer. No doubt the rock was responsible for that, too. Making his way as best he could to

THE POWER OF GOLD

the sea, Roger drew his handkerchief from his pocket, dipped it in the cool water, then came back to the Chinaman and bathed his face. He reached mechanically for his emergency case, his hand dropping as he realized his pockets were empty. Again he made a trip to the water's edge, and again returned to Chung, this time his efforts proving successful; Chung opened his eyes with a groan.

"What is it, old chap?" asked Roger kindly.

"Oh, my head; oh, ache heap lots! My leg, too, him hurt; me think him allee same bust." Roger immediately examined the leg in question, and found it was broken.

"It is broken, Chung; but you lie here till I go up this hill and look around; must see where we are and get some help."

When he reached the top of the hill, he saw some two miles away the roofs of a few scattered houses. Hurrying back as fast as he could, he told Chung of the village close by, but that he would have to leave him for a while to seek help. Taking off his coat and rolling it up for a pillow, he slipped it under Chung's head, then started off.

Reaching the village, he found it to be the "Point," the place he started out for, it being the second stopping place of the steamer, but the steamer had gone—sailed at daybreak, he was told.

After securing a wagon and driver, they went back for Chung, Roger thinking and planning all the way what his next step would be. He asked the driver where the steamer's next stop was and if there was a telegraph office in the village.

"Yes," was the reply. But all lines were down; the storm had been very severe. However, there was a ferry going over to the

THE POWER OF GOLD

mainland in the afternoon, and just a bare possibility it might arrive at the landing before the steamer left, as it usually remained at Nattza several hours for freighting purposes.

At last they arrived to where Chung was lying, and placing him very carefully on the mattress in the bottom of the wagon, they proceeded back to the village, driving very slowly so as not to jar the poor fellow any more than necessary. Arriving there, Chung was placed in the care of a trained nurse in the small hospital. The young doctor in charge of the hospital was an old college friend of Roger's and from him he borrowed what money he needed for his journey. Roger had just time enough to drink a cup of coffee, eat a sandwich and make for the ferry, which left at five P.M. They arrived at the mainland about eight that night, just in time to see the steamer turn at a point three miles upstream, heading direct for Montreal, due to arrive at seven o'clock Thursday evening, April the twentieth. It was maddening. Again he sought the telegraph office, but with no better result. All lines were still down. What was he to do? Roger walked the length of the one main street, baffled and dismayed. If only he had been fortunate enough to have caught the boat he would have arrived in time. Dorothy had failed to state the hour or place of the wedding, but the paper he had opened before the arrival of her letter had given all particulars.

His mind now reverted back to the article written under Molly's photograph: "Miss Molly Wainwright, whose marriage takes place at the home of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Philip Wainwright, 'Avalon,' Thursday evening, at eight-thirty."

Here it was Wednesday evening, eight-thirty exactly. Just

THE POWER OF GOLD

one day more, and he five hundred miles away! In desperation he made his way down to the small wharf and sought the ticket office. The man in charge was just leaving. Roger asked him if there was any possible way by which he might get in touch with Montreal.

"Well," replied the man, "if it is really urgent and you have some money to spend, why not get someone to drive you out to the airdrome? They have an airplane they use for carrying mail from all these small northern points."

"Good!" exclaimed Roger, his face beaming. "Can you tell me where I can get someone to drive me? I'll pay anything they ask."

The man grinned and led the way to a lean-to livery stable, where in the stalls stood two of the poorest old horses Roger had ever seen, and an equally poor dilapidated old democrat stood in the patch of ground.

The livery man, a slow old codger, agreed to make the trip for twenty-five dollars.

"Done!" cried Roger. "Get the nags out and let's start," and he himself began helping to harness them.

About sunrise the next morning they arrived in the town of Barrett. Roger found that the aviator wouldn't be at the station until seven o'clock, so he went up to the hotel, where he had breakfast and a wash. Then he made his way back to the airdrome. To his dismay, he was told that the mail-collecting airplane was out; wouldn't arrive back till six that evening.

"Six o'clock," repeated Roger in consternation. "Why, that's too late entirely."

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Can't help it. It won't be here sooner," replied his informant. Once again he sought the telegraph office; but here, too, he was baffled. He went back to the hotel, got a room and stretched himself on the bed. Tired as he was, sleep was out of the question. He lay staring up at the ceiling, thinking of Molly, thinking of Dorothy's letter and what it implied. Poor Molly, poor, dear girl! It was clear to him now why she had acted so. He should never have doubted her for a minute. Oh, if he only got there before it was too late. To think of anything else sent him crazy. He must be in time! She couldn't become Oliver's wife! What if he had never received Dorothy's letter! But he would go mad if he lay there thinking.

He got up, had a bath, shaved and had lunch, the last item being soon dispensed with, as the lunch was not of the best and Roger had little appetite.

Paying his bill, he left the hotel to stroll aimlessly through the little town. He put in the long sunny afternoon as best he could. The beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead, so great was the tension.

About five-thirty a buzzing hum heralded the approach of a big white airplane. It had no sooner touched the ground than Roger was at its side, talking excitedly to the pilot, putting up a strong plea, stressing the importance of reaching Montreal at once. The pilot was a jolly, benevolent sort of chap, who not only granted his request, but promised that as soon as he had a snack of supper they would be on their way.

Therefore, in about twenty minutes, the pilot in his place at the wheel, Roger beside him, the airplane rose slowly from the

THE POWER OF GOLD

ground and went sailing through the air toward Montreal.

If only they had no delay! The slightest change in the sound of the engine caused Roger the greatest alarm, and he would call out frantically to the pilot: "Not going to stall, is she?" Then, being reassured, he would breathe easily once more. The first hour Roger felt so relieved to find himself actually on his way, headed at last for Montreal, that his spirits went soaring also, but as the sun began to dip down towards the west a pang of uncertainty shot through him, and he began to wonder if they could make it after all. Repeatedly he took out his watch. Seven o'clock, half past seven, a quarter to eight! Urgently he begged to be taken direct to the house. No, the pilot was sorry; they couldn't do that. It was as much as his position was worth to land anywhere but at the company's field. They weren't supposed to carry passengers, anyway. "But," Roger questioned, "will we make it in time? Here it was ten minutes to eight." The pilot, eager to do his best, speeded up. Faster they flew, and yet faster. The tops of the buildings at last could be discerned, and a few minutes later the plane nosed downwards, gliding swiftly to the ground just as the town clock chimed the hour of eight. Handing the pilot a one hundred dollar bill, he dashed from the machine and rushed to a telephone booth. Get the house! Ask for Molly! If he couldn't get her direct, send a message.

Savagely he clicked for central, looking hastily down the directory for the number. Here it was. Giving it hurriedly, he said: "Ring them hard, central, please."

This was repeated three or four times; then central, in low, measured tones, said: "They do not answer."

THE POWER OF GOLD

Dashing out, he hailed a passing taxi, swearing at himself for the precious moments he had lost in attempting to phone. Giving the address to the driver, he jumped in, telling him to drive like mad. A hundred dollars was his if he got him there in ten minutes.

"Can't do it, sir! Clear across the city; but I'll do my best."

Away they went, tearing madly through the streets, Roger with his watch in his hand. Five minutes passed; ten, fifteen, eighteen, now twenty! Not there yet!

"Gosh, man, hurry, hurry!" cried Roger frantically. "Break all the speed laws, only get me there in time. By jove, I'll miss it yet."

Quicker and quicker they dashed along in and out among the traffic, down side streets, where the road was less crowded, then around the corner on two wheels.

"Here it is, this corner house," called Roger excitedly, noticing instantly the line of cars. The brakes of the taxi screeched as they came to a stop. Roger, springing out, called to the driver to wait, then ran up the walk to the side entrance, looking neither right nor left. Clearing the steps with a bound, he was in the side hall. No one was there, though he could see the crowds of guests in the front hall and reception rooms. The soft strains of the orchestra were playing some appropriate air, while all about was a hushed, expectant atmosphere.

Roger breathed heavily. He was in time. They were waiting for something or someone, perhaps Molly. Perhaps she wasn't ready yet.

He glanced cautiously around. Surely there were back stairs! If he could only find them. He opened a door softly—a clothes

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Stop that car! I say, stop it!"

The "cop" took up the chase, blew a shrill blast on his whistle and was almost instantly joined by a bevy of others.

With a glance from the rear window Roger saw them, threw back his head and laughed. Then putting his arms around Molly, he cried:

"Let them come! Let them all come! What do we care; we're gaining on them, anyway. See, they're not in sight."

"But they will be in a minute," Molly laughed. "We've just turned a corner."

Then, from the depths of Roger's arms:

"Oh, we've stopped; we've stopped, Roger! What is it?" And she raised her head to peer out. They had turned another corner, and for the moment their pursuers were not in sight.

Roger looked mystified and anxious. They had indeed stopped. Their driver could be seen leaving the car and running to the side of the road. Quickly Roger thrust his head out the window and beheld the chauffeur racing to where a detour sign lay at the side of the road. It took but a moment to pull it into position again behind their car, necessitating all other traffic to turn to the right at this point.

Grinning at the two watching from the car, the driver called out as he ran back and jumped to the seat again: "Guess that will hold them for a while."

"Good stuff!" laughed Roger. "Fine idea."

"Oh, hurry, hurry!" begged Molly, laughing nervously. "They'll be here in a minute; they'll see us!" But in another second their taxi turned into a lane and on down to a little side

THE POWER OF GOLD

street, where the driver brought his car to a stop in front of a small brown cottage.

"I suppose this will do," he said, still grinning. "Want me for a witness?"

"Sure thing; step right along."

"But, Roger, dear, where is the license and the ring?" asked Molly, as Roger helped her out.

"That's alright, honey, I got them both while waiting for that airplane. Thought it might be as well to be prepared anyway, in case—"

Just then the door opened in response to their knock.

When they left the cottage and again climbed into the taxi, Roger, smiling fondly at his lovely bride, said:

"Well, Mrs. Holmes, I suppose now we'll drive to our wedding reception. I took the opportunity of phoning from the cottage while you were fixing your veil. Thought I had better let them know we were married and would be right along to receive all congratulations. I asked for Cliff; considered he was a good person to break the news to; so they'll be prepared for our arrival—give Blake's folks time to get their bonnets on and hike for home. They will be a mad bunch. I also phoned Mother and Dad; asked them to put on their best 'bib and tucker' and come on over and join the festivities. Was that alright, dearest? Dad's so dreadfully sorry for what he did about those shares. He has written me so many times. He's full of contrition."

"Why, of course, Roger, I am glad you phoned them. Your father has paid the money back and that stock episode is a thing of the past, and all is serene between our parents, dearest, but I

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THE POWER OF GOLD

knew nothing of it till Mother told me today. It wouldn't have made the slightest difference, anyway, Roger darling. A thing like that would never have stopped me from marrying you. No, Roger, dear, it was something far greater. Oh, it was all so terrible! Oh, I never slept one wink last night, Roger; I was nearly crazy."

"Neither did I, sweetheart," as he kissed her again and again. "I was so mortally afraid I would be too late. How did you ever get into such a predicament, Molly, dear?"

"I'll tell you the whole thing from the very beginning."

And so she began unburdening it all to the sympathetic young husband at her side; even about the bracelet. And Roger spoke of how he had found it; how he had concluded she must have sold it because she didn't care to keep it. He also told her of little Dorothy's letter, and Molly murmured:

"The dear child."

Then about the voyage on the launch.

At this Molly shivered: "Oh, Roger, you might have been drowned. It makes me shudder to think of it."

"I didn't mind that so much, Molly, but it made me shudder and shake when I was afraid I wouldn't get here in time. Well, here we are home," as the car came to a standstill. "A long string of cars here yet. I expect they're all waiting to see the fun. Judging from the sound of things, they're having a good time, at any rate," as the sounds of laughter and various conversations could be heard from within.

"Did you have very many of Blake's friends, Molly?"

"No," replied Molly, as they passed through the gate after Roger had handed a hundred-dollar bill to the taxi driver.

THE POWER OF GOLD

"You see, Roger, we didn't consider that crowd would be of any help to Cliff or the girls, so after Ron was ill we just dropped them all and went back to those dear old friends we went with previously. They were so kind when Ronnie was ill, too; so we invited them, one and all, to the wedding. We only asked Oliver's relatives and Major Cole, who was to have been best man. He was in the car with Oliver. I wonder where they went?"

Before Roger could reply, the door opened and they were immediately surrounded by friends and relatives, everyone talking at once. Such a noise; such an uproar!

Margaret came forward and took Molly in her arms, while she shed copious tears of sublime happiness.

"Dorothy has told me partly, and you can tell me the rest when you see fit, but I know now you were doing it all for our sake, you dear daughter."

Then it was Roger's mother's turn to hold the bride tightly and weep.

The fathers were little better, wiping their eyes surreptitiously from time to time.

Then Dorothy came next, and Molly took the child in her arms, kissing her again and again. Dorothy whispered: "Was it all right, what I did, Molly?" And being assured heartily in the affirmative, asked: "And now you're happy, aren't you?" Molly kissed her again and said she was happier than ever before.

The girls crowded around, too, Shirley saying, "Oh, Moll, now we understand. We all thought you were crazy, but it's alright now. We're so glad, so happy!"

Betty hugged and kissed her, too. "You dear old thing, I'm

THE POWER OF GOLD

awfully glad you're married, but here are your four good bridesmaids all dressed up like Christmas trees. I've a good notion to make you get married all over again."

"Never mind, Betty," laughed Molly, turning to kiss Mildred Ross, "some one of you girls will have to be married soon, then the others can be bridesmaids and I'll be matron-of-honor."

"That's right," declared Milton, coming up with Doctor Ellis to offer their felicitations. "I'll second the motion."

Then came Cliff. Bending to kiss her, saying as he did so: "Oh, you poor kiddie ; what you must have gone through!"

"It was awful, Cliff, but it's all over now, and I'm going to try and forget it."

Just then Mr. Wainwright took hold of Molly's arm, drew her aside to say: "One moment, Molly; you remember the time Blake told me to buy wheat and I bought barley instead?"

"Do I, Dad? I couldn't forget it. It nearly ruined you."

"Well, Molly, that's what he intended to do. Look what I found in my desk a while ago, among some papers I brought home last week to look for an old receipt of his that I had forgotten to file. This is evidently a letter he meant to send to his friend, Major Cole. You know, barley did go up at that time, so I wouldn't have lost out in any event. On that account I presume he didn't send it, and forgot he hadn't done so, for it was lying there amongst his papers, not even in an envelope. For once he forgot something, and something which leaves damaging evidence against him, too."

Molly took the letter and read:

THE POWER OF GOLD

"Dear Cole:

"Please sell barley shares for what they will bring.

"No, it wasn't a mistake on old man Wainwright's part. I told him to buy barley for personal reasons of my own, but made him think I said wheat. Pretty slick, eh, old chap? You don't catch 'yours truly' napping. If one way won't work, another will. The one way didn't work with the young lady in question. I knew I was gaining no ground with her; never would so long as that chap, Roger, was on the map, so was forced to adopt drastic measures and take the other way, which was to break her father, with the result that I am now engaged to Molly.

"Yours,

"Oliver Blake."

"Dad," ejaculated Molly, as she stared with wide-open eyes at the letter in her hand, "the—the—scoundrel! Oh, how could he! Think what I escaped. Have you heard from him at all tonight?"

"Yes, Molly, he has phoned the house a dozen times since you and Roger dodged him, and each time demanded an explanation, and I concluded that the only gentlemanly thing to do was for me, as your father, on your behalf, to write him an apology. I opened my desk to get my notepaper; as, of course, it would be remiss to use my business pad, and while I was rumaging in a drawer, out fell this. When I stooped to pick it up my eye caught the phrase, 'old man Wainwright.' That is how I came to read it, and no sooner was I finished than Blake phoned again, this time angrier than ever, threatening to break me, and I don't know what all. So I told him, if he would remain in his rooms for an hour

THE POWER OF GOLD

I would send an explanation. I wanted to show you the letter first. I showed it to your Mother and now I intend to send him a copy of it, keeping the original, you understand. Along with the copy I shall send him a note to the effect that for personal reasons of your own you changed your mind, and if you had not done so I thought this letter would alter your decision in any case."

"Fine, Dad, fine! Do that; and richly he deserves it all! I'll leave you now. The orchestra is playing, and here is Roger for me."

She looked up into Roger's face with rapture in her eyes, as he put his arms around her and led her in to dance.

"It's our piece, Molly, darling. I had them play it for us."

And once more the dear familiar strains of "The West, a Nest and You" burst forth, some of the dancers humming the popular air as they danced, while Molly and Roger, their happiness complete, glided together to the rhythm of the melodious melody that had played such an important part in their romance.



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